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IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, IDENTITY DISCLOSURE, AND
IDENTITY EXPLORATION AMONG ADOLESCENT
SEXUAL MINORITIES

by

Jenna Ann Glover

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Psychology

Approved:

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2006

ABSTRACT

Identity Development, Identity Disclosure, and Identity Exploration
Among Adolescent Sexual Minorities

by

Jenna A. Glover, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2006

Major Professor: Dr. Renee V. Galliher
Department: Psychology

This study investigated the utility of applying the social constructionist perspective to adolescent sexual minority identity development, disclosure, and identity explorations. Differences between middle and late adolescents and male and females were examined. No differences were found between middle and late adolescents on measures of identity development and identity exploration; however, differences in identity disclosure were found regarding history of accidental discovery of sexual orientation. Biological sex differences were found for identity development, disclosure, and exploration. Relationships between same- and opposite-sex attractions, behaviors, romantic experiences, and self-labels are presented. Trends in intentional disclosure patterns and unintentional discovery identify predicted reaction as a primary motivator in disclosure. Finally, different relationship styles in which sexual minorities engage are presented. Outcomes of relationship styles show better psychosocial outcomes for those

engaging in different relationship styles compared to those who do not participate in relationships.

(127 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest and greatest appreciation in this process goes to Dr. Renee Galliher. She has provided countless hours of encouragement and support. I appreciate her optimism in all that I have done and, despite laughing every time I walk in her door now for another one of my hundred random questions, for always being willing to help. Having her as my advisor has been one of the most important keys to my success and happiness in graduate school.

I also greatly appreciate the time and expertise of my committee members, Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodriguez and Dr. Susan L. Crowley. Your input was helpful to me in refining my research and creating a more thoughtful and meaningful project.

Thanks must also be extended to my friends and cohorts. All of you have played a different role in helping me get this part of my journey done. With constant encouragement and support (thank you Tonya!) and “gentle kicks in the head” (Sara my loving LP!) thank you for your help with this part of my journey.

Finally, my biggest thanks and appreciation would be for my parents, who have been my biggest fans and supporters in all I have done in my life. They have given words of encouragement and offered their own hands (I’ll never forget you both coming with me to “queer prom”)! I give thanks to my mother for giving me passion and unrelenting excitement about education and discovery, and to my father for giving me the work ethic that has made my passion come to life. I love you both! Thank you for giving me the gift of never doubting what I could do.

Jenna Ann Glover

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent sexual minorities represent youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning their sexual orientation (Fisher & Akman, 1997). It is currently estimated that the prevalence of youth who identify as a sexual minority is between 4 and 17% of the U.S. adolescent population (Anhalt & Morris, 1998). These numbers represent a considerable portion of the adolescent population who differ from the majority of their peers and have taken an alternative pathway in the development of sexual orientation. This divergence from such expected societal norms creates unique developmental tasks and experiences for adolescent sexual minorities.

The dominant culture influences perceptions of sexual orientation by promoting the assumption of heterosexuality as the only normal developmental outcome, thereby creating challenges for sexual minority youth who are attempting to explore, accept, and integrate sexual orientation into their lives (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). For this reason, sexual minority youth may experience a different identity development process in which the knowledge that they are different is ever present (Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Such awareness often leads to conflicting feelings of confusion and frustration that must be negotiated by the adolescent; successful integration of identity is often contingent upon the manner in which the adolescent navigates the different aspects that contribute to overall development. Although there are numerous contributing variables that influence sexual minorities' development, the emphasis in the current study is on three essential components of experience that collectively influence this development: identity

development, identity disclosure (i.e., coming out), and identity exploration (e.g., romantic and sexual experiences). Both individually and collectively, these three aspects of experience play a critical role in adolescent sexual minority development. First, taken separately each component offers unique insight into the process of integrating sexual orientation with identity. Identity development may best be understood through an evaluation of the current models of identity development as well as the theoretical positions from which they are established. Next, the literature on identity disclosure offers valuable insight by identifying factors associated with successful and unsuccessful disclosure and how these factors contribute to integrating and expressing an adolescent's identity to others. Finally, exploration of romantic and sexual experiences provides insight into the impact of social factors on adolescent sexual minorities and the individual psychosocial outcomes that are influenced by these societal dynamics.

In order to better understand the process of merging sexual orientation with identity development, the collective influence of these factors must also be recognized. Integrated in this developmental process is the manner in which the adolescent chooses to self-label his or her sexual orientation based on attractions, emotions, and behaviors. Further, this self-labeling influences the process of sexual minority adolescents disclosing their sexual orientation. The final component of this developmental picture can begin to be understood through investigating the relationships in which adolescent sexual minorities choose to engage and how these relationships are associated with the above processes of identity labeling and disclosure.

The current study was designed to examine and describe three important developmental phenomena for sexual minority youth: sexual identity development,

sexual identity disclosure, and sexual identity exploration in the form of relational and romantic experiences. Stemming from current social constructionist views of sexual minority identity development, this study explored adolescents' self-labeling of sexual orientation and associations among sexual attractions, behaviors, relationships, and self-labeling. Adolescents' experiences of the coming out process were assessed with an emphasis on discovering links between identity development and coming out and learning more about patterns of disclosure (e.g., to whom the adolescents discloses, why, and when), and potential problems associated with unintentional discovery as opposed to intentional disclosure. Associations among sexual minority adolescents' identity disclosure histories, romantic experiences, self-esteem, and relationship competence were also examined. Finally, within each of these domains, gender and developmental stage differences were explored.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature is divided into four sections and provides: (a) an overview of the existing models of adolescent sexual minority identity development, (b) a review of the literature on identity disclosure (the coming out process), (c) an examination of the features and outcomes of identity exploration through romantic experiences for adolescent sexual minorities, and (d) the rationale and objectives for the current study. To establish greater clarity and consistency for the reader, a list of definitions for key terms used throughout the current study follows. Sexual orientation connotes one's choice in sexual partners. Sexual orientation is a complex construct including desires, attractions, and behaviors toward people of the same- or the opposite-sex. Traditional labels refer to mainstream names commonly associated with sexual orientation, which include straight, gay or lesbian, bisexual, and questioning. In contrast, dimensional definitions of sexual orientation are measured on continuous rating scales and recognize the diversity between people that cannot be represented by a specific label. Identity development is the process by which adolescents explore and integrate experiences in their lives (e.g., relationships, schooling, religion, hobbies) to determine their preferences, goals, values, and personality. More specifically sexual identity development refers to the process by which adolescents explore and integrate attraction, desires, sexual behaviors, and how they identify (i.e., self-label) these experiences. Identity disclosure, more commonly known as coming out, is the process by which adolescents purposefully reveal their sexual orientation to others. In contrast, accidental

discovery occurs when sexual orientation is unintentionally found out by someone who was not targeted for purposeful disclosure. Finally, identity exploration is the process whereby adolescents develop interpersonal relationships of varying levels of both emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy in an attempt to establish or express their sexual identity.

Identity Development

During adolescence young people are faced with several new challenges. Perhaps the most salient of these tasks is the formation of individual identity (Erikson, 1968). During this critical period, adolescents are expected to negotiate developmental tasks that include forming a cohesive sense of self, achieving autonomy while maintaining belongingness, and demonstrating independence while balancing being supported (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Often these important tasks are achieved through social comparison and being able to identify with the standards and norms of the main population; therefore, individuals who are unable to compare and identify with the dominant culture might represent a group that experiences a different developmental trajectory than the general population. Adolescent sexual minorities represent such a group that is markedly different from the dominant culture in sexual orientation. This divergence from the main culture's assumed developmental path creates a novel point of reference in identity formation for adolescent sexual minorities. Striepe and Tolman (2003) offered further insight into the unique developmental challenges experienced in identity formation by sexual minority adolescents.

Few adolescents worry that they will have to sit down with their parents and confide what they have come to realize about their sexual identity, that is to say

“Mom, Dad, I’m straight.” In our society, heterosexuality is assumed from birth. It is when adolescents show signs of being different than the heterosexual norm that sexual identity becomes a visible aspect of development. (p. 523)

This statement underscores the influential role that sexual orientation can play in identity development. Because of the unique challenges theoretically faced by youth whose sexual orientation differs from heterosexuality, researchers in this field have begun to explore identity development in sexual minorities. Both past and current research in this area has been founded on two prominent theoretical perspectives that have emerged in an attempt to conceptualize identity development for adolescent sexual minorities.

Theoretical Perspectives

Essentialism. Historically, one of the most prominent perspectives in sexual orientation has stemmed from essentialism. In respect to sexual orientation, essentialists contend that a common component exists that connects people in different eras and across different cultures who experience same-sex desires and behavior (Broido, 2000). The definitive ideological feature of the essentialist perspective posits that sexual orientation is a stable construct and a fundamental aspect of a person’s identity (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). From this perspective, sexuality is objectively conceptualized and assumes that sexual orientation has a constant, intrinsic, and a socially independent influence on identity development (Richardson, 1993). Therefore, sexual orientation is considered an essential characteristic of an individual. Despite the historical dominance of the essentialist perspective on sexual orientation, recent research has begun to challenge this theoretical position.

The essentialist view that sexual orientation is a central, fixed, and stable construct has prompted criticism from contemporary sexual minority researchers who

challenge the position that sexual orientation (e.g., homosexuality) is an essential personality characteristic (Richardson, 1993). Emergent research, instead, has presented a model that does not identify sexual orientation as exclusively intrinsic, but rather identifies sexual orientation as a role defined by personal, social, and cultural standards (Broido, 2000). These competing ideas are embodied by the social constructionist perspective that has become a significant theoretical position in exploring how sexual orientation impacts identity development.

Social constructionist. The key feature of the social constructionist theory is an emphasis on how individuals relate to each other, how culture and society impact this process, and finally, the phenomenological reality taken from these integrated parts (Owen, 1992). From this viewpoint, social constructionist theory can be applied to many fields of study and is particularly salient for understanding complex developmental constructs and processes such as emotion, gender, sexual orientation, and identity development. In approaching these different topics, social constructionist theory acknowledges the abstract qualities of personal experience and interaction. This is accomplished through understanding the meaning given to different outcomes via personal, social, and cultural perspectives. Overall, the social constructionist theory provides a departure from an “essential” conceptualization of complex processes by underscoring that human behavior and development cannot be understood in a social or cultural vacuum (Schaller, 2002).

In regards to sexual orientation, the social constructionist perspective holds that identity is not essential but rather is “constructed” from social and cultural frameworks (Broido, 2000). This perspective challenges suppositions from the essentialist tradition

that sexual orientation is universally stable. The social constructionist position influences sexual minority identity development theory by maintaining that the etiological source of sexual orientation is not necessarily salient to the individual, rather the personal and social meaning underlying sexual orientation is the critical component of identity (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Further, social constructionist theory recognizes that “snap shots” of behavior should not be identified as fixed blue prints of a person (Carol, 1999). The importance of this approach is critical in examining the complex interplay of how an individual negotiates desires, attractions, behaviors, and self-labeling that may be transitional or inconsistent from a homogenous and fixed process. From this viewpoint, researchers have recognized that sexual orientation is impacted by social and cultural factors and have now begun to examine and generate models of identity development that seek to explore how this collective experience influences identity development in adolescent sexual minorities (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

Models of Sexual Identity Development

The various models that have been developed to clarify the role of sexual orientation in overall identity development stem primarily from two approaches reflecting the theoretical positions defined above. First, stage models stem from the essentialist perspective and represent a linear developmental path marked by passage through relatively determined and universal stages. In contrast, multidimensional models draw from the social constructionist perspective and are characterized by processes that explore the effects of society and broader cultural implications for the influence of sexual orientation on identity development (Hollander, 2000).

Stage models. One of the first models of sexual minority identity development was created by Cass (1979). Cass designed a model of homosexual identity development based on the assumption that identity is acquired through interaction between individuals and environments. The model consists of four distinct linear stages in which individuals seek to find acceptance in both their own self-perception and among the perceptions of others (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991). The primary focus of this model is the individual reconciliation of personal and societal views in recognizing and accepting a homosexual identity (Cass, 1984). This model has served as an important foundational starting point and provided a framework for the development of additional stage models of identity development. Another prominent stage model of development was presented by Troiden (1988). Troiden designed an “ideal-typical model of homosexual identity” that consists of four stages through which an individual passes (multiple times if necessary) to develop a homosexual identity (Troiden, p. 105). Though this model represents linear and stage-dependent development, it assumes that homosexuality identity is an emergent process, and that individual development will vacillate within and through these stages (Hollander, 2000). Overall, both of these models reflect the essentialist view of sexual orientation as a fixed and unchanging aspect of identity development; however, within this theoretical framework are inherent assumptions that weaken the practical application of stage models.

Limitations of stage models. The major feature of stage models is the attempt to capture general patterns that represent elements of identity development for sexual minorities (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Despite the ability of these models to identify common themes in identity development, the linearity of these models offers an approach

to sexual minority development that may be too narrow. Stage models suggest that identity development has only one path with one universal starting point for all individuals rather than offering possibilities of multiple paths with multiple starting points that lead to different developmental experiences in the formation of identity (Weinberg, 1984). Thus, stage models may lack the scope to recognize the diversity of individual experiences of sexual orientation and how they may or may not influence identity development.

Multidimensional models. In response to the limitations of stage models, recent theories have emerged seeking to expand the conceptualization of identity development beyond a linear, stage-dependent course to a process-oriented perspective that addresses the multidimensional aspect of identity development (Hollander, 2000). Cox and Gallois (1996) outlined social identity theory, which focuses on social influences in the development of identity and how these effects impact the broader social structure. There are two core components that define social identity theory. First, self-categorization is the process by which we ascribe to self-defined social identities through the acceptance of normative behaviors and values that are representative of group membership. The second component of social identity theory, social comparison, involves the enhancement of self-esteem through adoption of personal identity that is based on unique aspects of the person. By outlining these two components, the model seeks to identify and understand the bidirectional interaction and influence of individuals and groups in the social milieu, recognizing that social identity and personal identity allow people to interact at different societal and interpersonal levels. With regard to sexual orientation, this conceptualization results in a complex configuration of identity that provides a greater spectrum in which

individuals may develop and label their sexual orientation and identity, and has established a new standard on which future models can build.

The most recent model of sexual minority identity development relies heavily on the social identity model and is concerned with the interactive influences between the individual and social environment (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). However, this model departs from the existing models presented in this paper by specifically examining desire, behavior, and identity as three separate constructs related to sexual orientation and identity, emphasizing the salience of the individual meaning ascribed to each of these constructs.

Once the categories of desire, behavior, and identity are separated, it's theoretically possible for a person to change his or her sexual identity or behaviors while maintaining an underlying sexual orientation...in this sense social constructionist perspective empowers the individual's choice in sexual expression, while recognizing that there may not be a choice in the orientation of sexual desire. (Horowitz & Newcomb, p. 16)

This multidimensional explanation of sexual orientation recognizes the importance of society's influence while maintaining that individuals are able to choose how their identity will be defined within culture rather than being defined solely by their sexual orientation. The overall purpose of this model is to create an inclusive description of identity development that is not restricted to limited and insufficient labels generated by the existing models of identity development.

The multidimensional model lends itself to the notion that sexual orientation and identity do not exist as fixed points (i.e., homosexual or heterosexual), but rather represent a continuum of experience. However, despite the recent emergence of these models, the conceptualization of sexual orientation as a continuous variable is not new to

the field. In his landmark research over 60 years ago, Kinsey indicated that it is erroneous to conceptualize sexual orientation as dichotomously distributed but rather it should be approached as continuum based.

More basic than any error brought out in the analysis...is the assumption that homosexuality and heterosexuality are two mutually exclusive phenomena emanating from fundamentally and, at least in some cases, inherently different types of individuals. Any classification of individuals as 'homosexuals' or 'normal' (=heterosexuals) carries that implication. (Kinsey, 1941, p. 425)

Kinsey gathered histories from more than 1,600 men and reported a probable lifetime occurrence of 50% or more of the male population becoming involved in some form of same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of what they identified as their sexual orientation. These outcomes are historically significant and suggest validity for the use of a multidimensional approach to conceptualizing sexual orientation. However, several criticisms have been raised against Kinsey, specifically regarding external validity concerns associated with sampling issues and the integrity of the results obtained (Brecher & Brecher, 1986; Ericksen, 1998). Despite these concerns, Kinsey initiated an interesting body of research that has not been revisited until recent years. More recent research has addressed many of the methodological issues associated with Kinsey's work and extended the literature on sexual orientation and identity development.

Perhaps the greatest area of growth in this body of research is the recognition of a need to move away from categorical labels to continuous definitions, with the resultant development of numerous measures aimed at assessing sexual orientation differently (Baltar, 1998; Holden & Holden, 1995; Rothblum, 2000). Sell (1996) conducted a large scale review of different measures of sexual orientation examining various dichotomous, bipolar, orthogonal, and multidimensional scales. It was found that the most

representative scales capturing the full range of participants' experiences were those that gave participants the flexibility to identify their sexual attractions, behaviors, attitudes, and orientation on multiple continuums. Only limited research has been published that actually utilizes this conceptualization; however, the few studies that have been conducted offer promising insights for using a multidimensional approach not seen in previous research. For example, Johns (2004) used multidimensional scales to measure identity development in a sample of 143 adult sexual minority participants. She found that participants viewed identity formation occurring in different phases rather than linear stages. This was described by the researcher as either an unintegrated identity (i.e., sexual orientation not part of individual's identity) or a fully integrated identity (i.e., sexual orientation is a part of individual's identity), thus representing different phases rather than a single-stage dependent course. By using a continuum-based measure, participants had the opportunity to explain their experiences in a manner that provided support for a multidimensional approach rather than a stage-based process.

Kinnish (2003) recruited 762 heterosexual and sexual minority participants (i.e., bisexual, gay, lesbian). The participants were asked to retrospectively indicate their sexual behavior, fantasy, romantic attractions, and identity using a 7-point Kinsey scale for a 5-year period beginning at the age of 16. Results indicated that individuals who identified as bisexual reported the most transitions in sexual identity (e.g., changing self-label of sexual orientation to bisexual from straight, or gay to bisexual) over the 5-year period, gay men and lesbian women reported the second most, and heterosexual individuals reported the fewest. It is interesting to note that lesbian women reported a greater number of transitions in sexual identity compared to gay men. These results

suggest important gender differences between different sexual minority groups in the development of identity that could be better understood upon additional investigation. Also, limitations of retrospective studies such as accuracy of memory accounts should be considered and further research utilizing an adolescent population could help clarify this body of research. Specifically, examining changes in sexual identity, behavior, and attractions throughout adolescence or examining differences between younger and older adolescents in the self-descriptions of their sexual orientation would begin to address remaining questions about the development of sexual identity. In addition, including an examination of the differences between genders in this review would provide a clarifying extension to the research cited above and help determine any important differences between or within these two sexual minority groups (i.e., gay men vs. lesbian women).

Future directions. Although stage theories have been important in identifying patterns and milestones in sexual minority development, it is now necessary to explore how this development occurs. The multidimensional models of sexual identity development provide a framework that seeks to understand the process component in sexual identity development; however, due to the recency of the emergence of these models, research that utilizes this perspective has been limited to adult samples. Future research is needed with adolescent and young adult populations to explore individual experiences of the process of sexual identity development and associations among sexual feelings, behaviors, and self-labeling of sexual orientation. Also, more research is needed that specifically targets differences and growth within and between middle adolescence and early adulthood as well as gender differences in these groups. Such research would utilize the important components of the multidimensional models by offering insight that

uncovers how sexual orientation and identity development are likely a continuous process rather than a definitive ending point across different ages and gender groups. As researchers move away from past models and view sexual orientation and identity development in a new light, additional research will begin to uncover a more accurate picture of identity development in this population (Savin-Williams, 2005). The current study asked sexual minority adolescents to define their sexual attraction utilizing both the social constructionist view of a dimensional continuum of sexual identity and more traditional categorical descriptions (e.g., homosexual vs. heterosexual). Also, the current study examined how adolescent timing (e.g., age of onset) and reports of same- and opposite-sex attraction and romantic or sexual behaviors corresponded with how sexual orientation was labeled. The reports of middle adolescents were compared with those of late adolescents and young adults, and differences between male and female respondents were examined in order to further understanding of the conceptual efficacy of multidimensional models.

Identity Disclosure

The formation of identity is a complex and lengthy process for adolescents, and may be particularly so for sexual minority adolescents who may experience substantial challenges in deciding how their sexual orientation should be integrated into identity and how that identity should or should not be presented to others. Complications from this process stem from a dominant cultural perspective that assumes group membership to be predominately heterosexual; therefore, sexual minorities' departure from this assumption

may prompt a disclosure of identity to prevent others from assuming them to be heterosexually orientated (Strommen, 1993).

Disclosure of an individual's sexual identity, also known as coming out, is a process through which sexual minorities identify their sexual orientation and choose to integrate this identity into their personal and social lives. Coming out is a complicated series of cognitive, affective, and behavioral transitions through which an individual identity is established and social change is created. Further, individuals who go through this process are conversely affected by the socialization standards that society imposes on individual identity (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Historically, research has identified the typical age of sexual orientation disclosure to be around 20 years; however, recent studies report that the average age of disclosure has decreased to approximately 16 years, making this an increasingly salient issue for adolescent sexual minorities (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pinkington, 1998; Henderson, 1998; Saltzburg, 2004). Coming out itself is a developmental process that is emergent and can occur across multiple points of experience such as recognition of same-sex attraction, exhibiting same-sex behavior, and the consideration of or the taking on of a sexual minority orientation. Regardless of the adolescent's decision to disclose, this process is often the source of both emotional and psychological stress (Harrison, 2003). Most individuals who consider sexual orientation as part of their identity must undergo a meaningful transition that evolves from an internal categorization of themselves to a possible external presentation of their identity. Thus, coming out is a dual process in which an adolescent must first self-discover by identifying and distinguishing the meaning of his or her sexual orientation in regards to identity and from that point make the decision to disclose to others.

Self-Discovery

Adolescence is a crucial time when several critical developmental milestones, such as the development and integration of sexual identity occur. The onset of puberty marks the emergence of sexual interest and experience for young people who must negotiate these emergent feelings and incorporate them into their own identity. This task may be problematic for sexual minorities who must navigate sexual thoughts, attractions, and behaviors that are distinctly different from the dominant culture, prompting the adolescent to assign meaning and understanding to these unique experiences (Anhalt & Morris, 1998). This process is the task of self-discovery and is a critical and precursory step toward self-disclosure to others.

Fundamentally, self-discovery is the means by which an individual acknowledges personal aspects of homosexuality in their lives (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). There are numerous outcomes that stem from the self-awareness of a nonheterosexual sexual orientation that can range from rejection, to confusion, to acceptance. One key component of influence in this process is an adolescent's individual sense of worth, which is dependent on both the validation given by the self and provided by society. Research in this area has identified both protective and risk factors in personal characteristics and the environment that influences the process of self-discovery as well as the individual validation that accompanies such awareness.

Protective factors. Individuals who are exploring same-sex interest in adolescence must draw from their own historical coping mechanisms and characteristics that have helped them adapt in the past. The repertoire of coping and survival skills is a salient component in how an adolescent will process the acknowledgement of possessing

homosexual characteristics (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Among the most significant factors predicting a positive self-discovery and resolution is the adolescent's level of self-esteem. From a general perspective, a high level of self-esteem has been found to be a positive feature in development for adolescents who belong to both minority as well as majority groups, and has been demonstrated to be a protective factor in identity development for adolescent sexual minorities (Anhalt & Morris, 1998).

To further understand the dynamics of how self-esteem is both cultivated and utilized by adolescent sexual minorities, Savin-Williams (1988) used self-reports of 317 gay and lesbian youths between the ages of 14 and 23 years to better understand the effects of self-esteem in the self-discovery process and its association with later self-disclosure to others. Results indicated that the best predictor of high self-esteem among gay and lesbian youths was the reported level of satisfaction in their relationships with their parents. Further, self-esteem not only impacted the self-discovery of sexual minorities, but also served as a critical factor in self-disclosure. Both high levels of self-esteem and positive prior relationships (e.g., family cohesion) were predictive of higher rates of self-disclosure (i.e., coming out) with more positive reactions to that disclosure (Harrison, 2003).

Other important factors have been identified as having a protective influence during the self-discovery process. Youth who report an internal locus of control, feelings of stability, predictability in their environments, and youth with high intellectual abilities have been found to be more successful in integrating their sexual orientation into their identity and maintaining a higher level of self-validation compared to other sexual minority adolescents (Anhalt & Morris, 1998). Additionally, coming to a resolution and

deciding to accept the identity of being a sexual minority is in itself a protective factor, with adolescents reporting higher levels of self-esteem when accepting (e.g., self-labeling) their sexual orientation as a part of their identity (Ebata, Petersen, & Conger, 1990).

An individual exploring homosexual interest in adolescence who has a history and repertoire of successful adaptation skills as well as a history of secure attachment will navigate the process—all things being equal—more successfully than the adolescent with a history of poor relational and coping abilities. (Tharinger & Wells, 2000, p. 162)

An important aspect to note is that the identified protective factors for sexual minorities are universal variables that promote positive coping and adaptation for adolescents who are navigating change or facing stress in general (Collins, 2003; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchev, 2002). Therefore at this point, research in the field has been successful in recognizing factors common in successful adolescent development, but has not distinguished protective factors that may be exclusive to sexual minority development. Further research is necessary to explore the possibility of unique protective factors in this population. Insight into what factors may possibly negate or hinder the development of these protective factors is a critical aspect in understanding how adolescent sexual minorities do or do not achieve a positive sense of identity as they navigate through the process of self-discovery.

Risk factors. In addition to the protective factors reviewed above, several risk factors may complicate the process of self-discovery. Perhaps the largest obstacle faced by adolescents who are seeking to explore and understand manifestations of homosexuality in their lives is the personal and social imposition of secrecy (Zera, 1992). A sense of obligation to maintain secrecy may be motivated by adolescents' perceptions

of possible disadvantages or even dangers associated with the acknowledgement and or disclosure of a same-sex sexual orientation. In this way secrecy is a negative influence and is further exacerbated when few opportunities exist for adolescent sexual minorities to openly explore and question their identity without potential risk (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Research has demonstrated that adolescents who attempt to breach secrecy by presenting their feelings and concerns about sexual orientation with a trusted adult are oftentimes dismissed by adults who view such questioning as “only a phase” (Zera). Such reactions from a trusted adult offer a punishing consequence and may cultivate feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and a loss of self-worth, which potentially impact negatively on the successful integration of sexual orientation into identity development.

Beyond the encumbering effects of secrecy, additional risk factors present added obstacles in experiencing a positive self-discovery process. Particular familial stressors in adolescence such as parental marital discord, family history of psychopathology, large family size, and low socioeconomic status have each been identified as potential risk factors in the self-discovery and coming out process (Anhalt & Morris, 1998). In addition, attachment style can be influential in the self-discovery process. Jellison and McConnell (2003) questioned 40 gay adult men and found that the men in the study with insecure attachments developed in childhood had lower self-esteem and demonstrated more difficulty accepting a homosexual identity. Overall, identifying both the positive and negative impact of the current factors on individual self-discovery provides insight into the contextual variables that influence the course of self-disclosure.

Self-Disclosure

The process of self-disclosure, commonly referred to as “coming out,” is the course of integrating aspects of homosexuality into one’s identity and presenting that identity to other people. Interestingly, there is no comparable developmental experience for heterosexual youth; thus, understanding the experience of coming out is an important task because it is exclusive to the experience of adolescent sexual minorities (Floyd & Stein, 2002).

The process of disclosing sexual identity covers a wide spectrum of cognitive, behavioral, and affective experiences that have an effect on the individual experience of coming out (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). For example, the coming out process may be markedly different for an individual who exhibits homosexual behavior and self-labels as gay or lesbian in contrast to an individual who experiences homosexual attraction but self-labels as a straight. Additionally, gender also influences the process by which disclosure takes place. Multiple studies have found that males consider, recognize, and often act on same-sex attractions at a younger age than females (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid, 1996). Recent research has offered a conceptual explanation for these differences between male and females.

For males, desire for a certain sexual activity appears to be sufficient motivation to pursue this activity whether it is same-sex sexual contact (among sexual-minority youth) or other-sex sexual contact (among heterosexual youths). For females, social context is critical. Few sexual minority or heterosexual females pursue sexual contact on the basis of sexual motivation alone....suggest[ing] that gender is a more powerful predictor of sexual behavior than is sexual orientation. (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000, p. 623)

These findings and statements mark the importance of gender and individual differences in the disclosure process. Research that does not investigate and consider these variables

may mistakenly report and generalize models that are not representative for specific subgroups of sexual minority adolescents.

These examples offer insight into the complexity of identity formation and integration, suggesting a possible long and complicated process involved in working toward disclosure. Research has validated the difficulty of coming out, reporting that on average, the age of first disclosure occurs approximately two years following the self-discovery process (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Perhaps a key component of this delay is the necessity for adolescents to evaluate and appraise predicted reactions (i.e., how their disclosure will be received and responded to by others).

Self-disclosure has the instrumental effect of acquainting others with one's gay identity and requiring a response to such a disclosure. The reactions of others may range from curiosity to respect for one's courage to judgmental withdrawal. Regardless of the response the [adolescent] experience is altered by the self-disclosure process. (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978, p. 65)

Often the reaction of others to disclosure becomes the critical factor in the coming out process; both gains and losses associated with disclosing must be carefully evaluated for potentially devastating consequences (Zera, 1992). It is difficult to provide generalized information that reliably predicts the reactions of others and individual reactions are widely variable (Savin-Williams, 1988). Despite the variability in reactions, there are common pathways that are experienced by those to whom the adolescent chooses to disclose; however, within these experiences a heterogeneous pattern of responses to disclosure emerges and these different reactions become potentially significant influences on the developmental process of the disclosing adolescent.

Reaction patterns. Disclosure of same-sex interests or a sexual minority orientation can impact friends and family in a profound way and often the reaction to

disclosure will be a long evolving process. Responses will range and often include negative reactions that come from violations of assumed expectations of heterosexuality. Although not applicable to all reaction responses, Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of death and grieving (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) offer insight into the reaction process for some loved ones. Different individuals may go through none, many, or all of these stages after hearing the adolescent's disclosure. Possible examples include denial (e.g., through believing it is only a phase); anger (e.g., parents blaming each other or themselves); bargaining (e.g., asking God to convert the adolescent); depression (e.g., guilt and shame of the adolescent); and acceptance (e.g., tolerance and sensitization to sexual minority orientation; Harris, 2003). Through these processes, individuals will eventually either accept or reject the adolescent's disclosure.

Acceptance theme. Among the different reactions to disclosure of a sexual minority orientation, acceptance is the most hoped for outcome. Acceptance is marked by the motivation of family and friends to understand and recognize the adolescent's sexual orientation and integrated identity (Strommen, 1993). Generally the first person disclosed to is a friend or same age peer because they are often viewed as being more supportive than a parent (Savin-Williams, 1995). In regards to families, acceptance of such disclosure is increased in homes where parents provide a generally high level of love and acceptance for their children. These same factors are positively correlated with increased self-esteem which, as previously stated, enhances adolescent's security in their relationships and tends to be associated with a more positive attitude about their sexual orientation (Beaty, 1999). Beyond these general characteristics, individual family dynamics also contribute to the level of acceptance exhibited from parents. D'Augelli and

colleagues (1998) found that mothers were usually disclosed to before fathers, which appears to be a function of perceived greater acceptance from mothers. Over one half of the maternal reactions ranged from acceptance to tolerance, while negative reactions were twice as common among fathers.

Additionally, D'Augelli (1991) found that when disclosed to, 75% of siblings were accepting or tolerant and only 15% were rejecting among a college sample of men in support groups. It is necessary to underscore that a limited amount of research has been done addressing the role of siblings in regard to adolescent sexual minority development and disclosure; therefore, this report on siblings is an important contribution in this body of literature. The high rate of sibling acceptance encourages future researchers to focus energy towards understanding the dynamics of adolescent sexual minorities' relationships with their siblings, and how the sibling relationship affects overall development.

Overall, the unpredictable nature of the disclosure process can be the source of an adolescent's emotional, social, and physical withdrawal (Zera, 1992). For that reason, acceptance of disclosure from family or friends can offer a powerful support that will help negate the personal and social conflicts that are inherently connected with developing and maintaining a sexual minority identity (Beaty, 1999). In contrast to this type of experience, adolescents whose disclosure is ignored or rejected will be presented with additional challenges and difficulties developing a secure and stable identity.

Rejection Theme. Rejection is a major concern and source of fear for adolescent sexual minorities who disclose to their family and friends. Thus, negative responses of denial and dismissal validate such fears and operate as risk factors in overall identity development (Beaty, 1999). In general, rejection following disclosure is frequently based

on conventional societal norms that reject developmental pathways that depart from established social values (e.g., assumed heterosexuality; Strommen, 1993). Individually or collectively, rejection of disclosure is more likely among those who perceive the adolescent's disclosure as a threat (e.g., maintenance of social norms, long held or traditional values and beliefs). In relation to sexual orientation, social validation is a powerful mechanism in the rejection process and can operate by projecting standards that invalidate sexual minorities both directly (e.g., same-sex attraction is 'sinful') or indirectly (e.g., "I still love you, but I don't accept your sexual orientation"; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Individuals who closely identify with these types of social appraisals will be more likely to reject the disclosure process and sexual orientation of the adolescent.

Rejection is more likely to occur in families with strong traditional values (e.g., importance of religion, emphasis on marriage and children), and adolescents from these types of homes are less likely to disclose to their parents than adolescents from families who do not emphasize traditional family values (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Parents who adhere to traditional values are likely to go through a grieving process where they mourn the loss of their child's heterosexual identity. Parents who go through this mourning process may never come to an acceptance of the adolescent's disclosure, and adolescents who experience this rejection are more prone to suffer verbal and physical abuse in the home (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Also, parents from these families may insist that the adolescent does not disclose to other extended family, thus undermining full acceptance of their adolescent's sexual orientation (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). In addition, family environments which offer limited or no support hinder the disclosure

process by increasing the risk of rejection (Beatty, 1999). Taken together, the negative ramifications of rejection can best be stated as adding to and validating the fears of social abandonment and psychological isolation which make the achievement of positive identity development less certain.

Future Directions

The process of self discovery through recognition and acceptance of personal sexual minority characteristics guides the course of later choices of disclosure. Responses and reactions to disclosure can either positively or negatively contribute to shaping how sexual orientation will influence an adolescent's identity. As noted above, the processes of self discovery and disclosure are beginning to occur at younger ages and may be markedly different for males and females; therefore, it is also important to consider both developmental age and gender in these processes. As an adolescent grows older it is likely that he or she will have increasingly more opportunities to disclose sexual orientation as well as have personal sexual orientation be inadvertently discovered; therefore, future research should seek to investigate differences in the disclosure experiences of middle versus late adolescent sexual minorities as well as differences between males and females.

Although the current literature in this field has successfully identified the reactions and effects of an adolescent's primary support group (e.g., family), an emphasis on parental reaction has resulted in research neglecting the interactive dynamics of peer, sibling, and other significant relationships in the disclosure process. In order to gain an understanding of the potential importance of these other relationship contexts, the current study asked participants to identify what motivates or discourages disclosure, levels of

acceptance or rejection from those disclosed to, predicted levels of acceptance or rejection from those not disclosed to, and how these factors influence adolescents' choices of targets of self-disclosure. Finally, differences between the disclosure experiences of middle and late adolescents as well as males and females were examined.

Beyond the discussion of deliberate self-disclosure is the question of outcomes for adolescent sexual minorities who are accidentally discovered. No research was identified that has addressed the disclosure process for adolescents whose sexual orientation was inadvertently or unwillingly disclosed. Such accidental discovery could range from betrayal by a trusted individual to whom the adolescent intentionally disclosed, to an adolescent being caught engaging in homosexual behaviors. Potential ramifications of the experience of being discovered are vast and the outcomes unknown; therefore, the current study had participants identify if their sexual orientation has been accidentally discovered, by whom, the reactions of others to this discovery, and differences experienced between males and females as well as between middle and late adolescents in regards to their experiences of accidental discovery.

Identity Exploration

Interpersonal processes and relationship experiences in adolescence are hypothesized to serve as the foundation for future romantic relationships. During this time, adolescents' exploration and experiences in peer relationships help to build interaction skills and provide the opportunity for romantic connections to develop (Furman et al., 2002). The dependence upon both individual peer contacts and peer groups as references for romantic relationship development presents unique challenges

for adolescent sexual minorities. The assumption of heterosexuality influences adolescents' relationship development because a majority of heterosexual peer groups discourage and disapprove of homosexual relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000). The rejection of alternative sexual orientation development among adolescent peer groups suggests that adolescent sexual minorities may be forced to establish meaningful interpersonal, sexual, and romantic relationships independent of peer support. This pattern stands in sharp contrast to the process for heterosexual youth, who work to develop these relationships within the supportive context of their peer groups. This divergence from majority peer development and supportive systems limits opportunities for sexual minority youth to explore different relationships with varying levels of intimacy; therefore, many adolescent sexual minorities may be forced to either abstain from romantic relationships or engage in alternative relationships (e.g., heterosexual dating, intimate same-sex friendships, or exclusively sexual relationships) in place of romantic relationships (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dube, 1999).

Relationship Withdrawal

The stigma surrounding the development of romantic relationships with same-sex partners and the difficulty of being able to identify other youth with same-sex romantic interest contribute to adolescent sexual minorities being less likely to have any type of romantic relationship experience during their middle and high school years compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Diamond & Dube, 2002). The difficulty in identifying any other sexual minority peers, especially a desired romantic partner, limits the opportunity for these students to learn and practice important interpersonal relationship skills that are critical in the development of adult romantic relationships (Connolly et al.,

2000). The aggregated results of these limiting factors may prompt some sexual minority adolescents to withdraw from any form of intimate relationship. Additionally, the complexities of the coming out process detailed in the previous section may further limit opportunities for exploration and practice in same-sex relationship building. Adolescent sexual minorities may either have not disclosed their sexual orientation or have been selective in disclosing to certain peers. The adolescent may worry that he or she cannot be too intimate with friends for fear that even platonic intimacy may be misinterpreted as sexual interest (Martin & Hetrick, 1988).

These obstacles often result in varying degrees of isolation and withdrawal, leading to sexual minority youth having smaller peer groups, hindering the closeness of friendships, and cultivating negative expectations about romantic relationships and control over their romantic lives (Diamond & Lucas, 2004). This social and emotional isolation is concerning and research has documented the associated negative outcomes (e.g., compromised self-esteem, high risk behaviors, mental health problems) for adolescent sexual minorities who are isolated from their peers (Alexander, 2002; Diamond, 2003; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Quinn, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1988; van Heeringen & Vincke, 2000). The negative implications of social and emotional isolation underscore the necessity for sexual minority adolescents to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships with peers and potential romantic partners. However, due to the difficulties in creating and maintaining a same-sex romantic relationship, many adolescent sexual minorities may be forced to seek alternative relationship contexts.

Alternative Relationships

As adolescent sexual minorities seek to fulfill their emerging social need for romantic and sexual involvement while navigating through the constraints of dominant heterosexual cultural assumptions, three main types of alternative relationships emerge. These types include: (a) commitment to a same-sex intimate friendship, (b) engagement in exclusively sexual relationship with a same-sex partner, and (c) participating in heterosexual dating.

Same-sex alternatives. The numerous impediments faced by sexual minority adolescents in forming romantic relationships often force these youth to adapt same-sex relationships that may provide limited benefits typically obtained in the context of a romantic partnership.

The difficulty inherent in simply identifying other sexual-minority youths creates onerous risk; in response to risk sexual minorities may strike a tenuous balance between risk and reward pursuing exclusively emotional or exclusively sexual relationships that allow them a measure of same-sex intimacy without placing them in jeopardy. (Diamond et al., 1999, p. 177)

Sexual minority adolescents may seek to develop intimate same-sex friendships in an attempt to cultivate a relationship that satisfies emotional needs that are usually fulfilled in a romantic relationship. The dynamics of these “passionate friendships” are marked by intense emotional investment, providing intimacy and support that is not dependent on sexual consummation (Diamond et al.). These types of friendships provide the closeness, intimacy, and often the exclusiveness of romantic relationships, but are devoid of other aspects such as sexual intimacy. Typically this pathway of emotional fulfillment through intimate friendships is more likely to occur among young women (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). In contrast, young men appear more likely to pursue a pathway that focuses on exclusively sexual relationships (Diamond, 2003).

Due to social norms and gender expectations, young men are generally not afforded the opportunity to develop deeply intimate same-sex friendships characterized by mutual self-disclosure, affection, and tenderness; therefore, relationships that are based on exclusive sexual intimacy may be the only avenue perceived by adolescent boys to have a same-sex relationship (Diamond et al., 1999). Such relationships may be important in serving as a means to validate same-sex attractions and confirm aspects of the adolescent's sexual orientation; however, such relationships are limiting due to the lack of emotional intimacy that is characteristically tied to more intense physical intimacy in romantic relationships.

Heterosexual alternatives. There are numerous reasons that contribute to adolescent sexual minorities' decisions to engage in heterosexual dating and relationships. Perhaps the most salient factor is the normative pressure toward opposite-sex dating during adolescence. Such pressure may provide a myriad of motivational aspects for adolescent sexual minorities to participate in heterosexual dating. These may include dating to explore sexual orientation questions, dating to cover or hide a confirmed sexual minority identity from peers, or dating to fulfill romantic needs. Engagement in heterosexual dating should not automatically be assumed to be an unsatisfying experience for sexual minorities and can provide important social and interpersonal developmental opportunities and benefits (Diamond, 2003). Additionally, it is recognized that the majority of sexual minority youth date heterosexually throughout adolescence (Diamond, et al., 1999). However, the limited amount of research focused on this topic has yet to address several possibilities of both negative and positive outcomes of heterosexual dating among adolescent sexual minorities.

Future Directions

Dating and developing romantic relationships is one of the primary experiences of adolescence; it is socially scripted and serves the purpose of helping youth integrate their developing sexuality into socially appropriate avenues that will serve as the foundation for future intimate interpersonal relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994, 1997). Despite the importance of the dating experience, only a limited amount of emerging research has sought to address the diverse roles that sexual minorities assume in the context of dating relationships. Also, current research should seek to document the diverse experiences within the sexual minority community as well as the developmental changes and implications (Diamond et al., 1999). As adolescent interpersonal relationships set the groundwork for future romantic relationships, a developmental perspective is needed that measures differences in romantic experiences and competency across middle adolescence and spanning to young adulthood (Connolly et al., 2000). The current study examined the function and importance of these various relationship types and how they are associated with psychosocial and identity development specifically reviewing differences in relationship style between middle and late adolescents and between males and females.

Purpose and Objectives

It is evident from the current literature review that certain aspects of the development of adolescent sexual minorities require further attention from researchers. This study investigated the process of identity formation by examining the means through which adolescent sexual minorities integrate sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and sexual or romantic experiences. Specifically, this study addressed the process of identity

labeling, disclosure of identity, and maintenance of identity through relationships while exploring for important gender and age differences. Specific research questions are as follows:

1. Identity Development Questions

- a. Are there differences between middle adolescents (i.e., high school students) and late adolescents/emerging adults (i.e., posthigh school through 21 years) or between males and females in self-identification using either traditional labels or scores on continuous measures of heterosexual attraction and homosexual attraction?
- b. What are the patterns of association among adolescents' self-labeling of sexual orientation and reports of sexual attraction, sexual behaviors, and romantic experiences?

2. Identity Disclosure Questions

- a. Are there differences between middle and late adolescents or between males and females in their reports of their histories of self-disclosure and discovery?
- b. Who are the primary individuals to whom adolescents disclose their sexual orientation, what reactions to disclosure are reported by adolescents, and what motivates adolescents to choose to disclose to these individuals?
- c. Who are the individuals to whom adolescents choose not to disclose their sexual orientation, how do adolescents predict these individuals will react, and what motivates the decision of adolescents not to disclose to these individuals?

- d. Who are the individuals most likely to accidentally discover adolescent's sexual orientation, what are the reactions to accidental discovery reported by adolescents?
- e. Are there differences in the reported self-esteem of adolescent sexual minorities who are unintentionally discovered relative to those whose identity has not been accidentally disclosed?

3. Identity Exploration Questions

- a. Are there differences between middle adolescents and late adolescents and between males and females in the types of romantic and sexual relationships/experiences that they report? Differences will be examined in terms of dating and relationship experiences (having a crush, dating, going steady) and sexual behaviors (affectionate behaviors such as hand holding, petting behaviors, or sex) with both same- and opposite-sex partners.
- b. Are there differences between individuals with different predominant dating styles (e.g., same-sex romantic relationships, same-sex passionate friendships, same-sex exclusively sexual relationships, heterosexual relationships, or no participation in relationships) in terms of self-esteem and relationship competence?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

A correlational design was used for the study, examining the associations among self-report measures of sexual attraction, behavior, self-labeling, disclosure experiences, relationship experience, self-esteem, and relationship competence.

Participants

The original targeted population were all sexual minority youth in the local surrounding areas; however, due to difficulties in recruitment, the population of interest was restricted to adolescent sexual minorities who were active in the sexual minority community. Participants were recruited using three different strategies. First, participants were recruited from events and activities sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center of Utah and local University Pride Alliances. These included events such as Queer Prom, weekend social events, and organizational meetings. Interested individuals were given or mailed a research packet that included a letter describing the study, consent forms, a set of survey measures, and a stamped return envelope. Approximately 76% of participants were recruited from these activities. Second, internet groups were contacted using a list serve from the Gay, Lesbian Bisexual, Transgender Community Center of Utah website. These groups were e-mailed and interested members contacted the student researcher who then mailed a research packet. Approximately 10% of the study's participants were recruited through internet groups. Finally, participants who completed the study were given referral cards to distribute to

other interested individuals. The remaining 14% of participants were recruited from referrals from previous participants and project staff.

Participants were between 14 and 21 years of age and were divided into two groups: one group represented participants still in middle or high school and the second group represented participants who were no longer in high school but less than 22 years old. Table 1 provides a summary of sample characteristics including age, biological sex, and sexual orientation label participants use for themselves as well as what label they tell others. The racial background of participants was self-identified as 87% White, 2% Asian, 8% Latino/Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 2% identified race as other. The religious affiliation was 48% Mormon (Latter-day Saints), 4% Catholic, 1% Protestant, 1% Jewish, 22% other, and 24% identified no religious affiliation. Fifty-two percent of participants' parents were married to each other, 38% had divorced or separated parents, 4% of the parents had never married, 4% were widowed, and the remaining 2% were unspecified.

Procedures

Participants under the age of 18 were required to have written parental consent in addition to providing written assent, while those who are 18 or older provided only their own signature (see Appendix A for consent form). The consent form was phrased generically to indicate that the study was designed to learn more about the development of dating and relationships among adolescents, so that adolescents who had not disclosed to their parents would not be precluded from participation. Participants either collected

Table 1

Sample Characteristics by Biological Sex and Middle and Late Adolescents (N = 82)

Characteristics	Males	Females	Middle	Late
Age (years)				
Mean (SD)	18.7 (1.4)	17.8 (1.7)	16.8 (1.1)	19.2 (1.2)
Middle adolescents	17.1 (0.6)	16.9 (1.3)		
Late adolescents	19.2 (1.2)	19.1 (1.4)	19.1 (1.4)	19.1 (1.4)
Mainstream label you use for yourself (N)				
Straight	3	11	6	8
Gay/lesbian	30	18	19	29
Bisexual	2	13	8	7
I Don't know	1	3	2	2
Other	0	1	1	0
Mainstream label you tell others (N)				
Straight	6	15	9	12
Gay/lesbian	28	17	17	28
Bisexual	2	11	7	6
I don't know	0	2	2	0
Other	0	1	1	0

Note. Middle = adolescents not graduate from high school or dropped out, Late = adolescents graduated from high school.

survey packets at community events or received packets in the mail after providing their addresses to the student researcher or research assistants. Questionnaire measures were completed by participants and returned in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The packet consisted of three measures that took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Participants were compensated for participation with \$10; the incentive was sent to participants by mail as soon as completed questionnaires were received. See Appendix B for copies of all measures.

Questionnaire Measures

Demographic information. The demographic section assessed race, age, gender, educational attainment, educational goals, religiosity, and educational attainment of parents.

Sexual development/identity survey. For the current study, a 25-itemed measure was created to obtain information on sexual identity development, identity disclosure, and identity exploration. No established measures were found that captured the range of behaviors, attractions, and aspects of identity that were relevant to the current study. Items were generated based on recommendations and identification of gaps in previous research. The purpose of the created measure was to provide a series of questions that utilized both dichotomous and fixed responses pertaining to attractions, behaviors, disclosures, and relationships as well as continuous and open-ended questions assessing the same outcomes in an attempt to understand unique differences that occur between these types of responses.

The first eight questions assessed experiences of different romantic and sexual behaviors; items were drawn from Rostosky, Welsh, Kawaguchi, and Galliher (1999) and were modified for the current study so that participants could report experiences with both same- and opposite-sex partners. Items asked if participants had engaged in each behavior with a male or female, and included crush, group date, individual date, gone steady with, affectionate behaviors (e.g., hand holding, kissing), petting, sexual intercourse, and saying "I love you." Response options included (1) never, (2) once in my life, (3) once in the last year, or (4) currently. The purpose of this question set was to gain

information about desires and behaviors in order to evaluate how these corresponded to both labeling of identity and romantic experiences between age and gender.

Question 9 provided two separate scales whereby adolescents could rate their level of sexual attraction using continuous measure. The first scale measured homosexual attraction with 1 = not at all homosexual and 10 = highly homosexual. The second scale measured heterosexual attraction with 1 = not at all heterosexual and 10 = highly heterosexual. The purpose of using two continuous measures was to represent the multidimensional model conceptualization of sexual orientation as variable rather than fixed endpoint. This question helped test this model by giving insight into any differences between behaviors and labels rated on categorical items.

Question 10 assessed the predominant relationship style reported by adolescents. Participants were given 5 relationship types (e.g., same-sex romantic, exclusively sexual, emotional friendship, heterosexual dating, or non-participating) from which to choose and were asked to select one type that best represented their relationship experience. Those who reported that they were predominantly non-participating may have included both those who purposefully abstained from relationships and those who wanted to engage in a relationship but were unable to develop one. The purpose of this question was to assess the predominant style of relationship for participants and compare these with romantic competency and self-esteem outcomes.

Questions 11, 12, and 13 assessed same-sex attraction, same-sex sexual behavior, and disclosure of same-sex attraction using dichotomous scales (yes or no). Participants were also asked to identify the age of onset for each. This set of questions was used to assess biological sex and developmental differences in age of onset and frequency of

these behaviors. Additionally, these items were compared to continuous ratings of attraction to determine consistency of dichotomous versus continuous measures.

Questions 14 through 20 assessed a variety of items in regards to identity disclosure and accidental discovery. Questions 14 through 17 asked participants to identify the five most important individuals whom they had and had not targeted for disclosure, as well as reactions or predicted reactions to disclosure using a 10 point likert scale with 1 = totally rejecting and 10 = totally accepting. Also, participants were asked two open-ended questions assessing motivation for disclosing or not disclosing. These items were included to gain information on disclosure targets, reaction patterns, and personal motivation in disclosure decisions. Questions 18 through 20 were used to assess accidental discovery experiences. Two items to indicate if they had been discovered and how they were discovered. Question 20 provided greater detail asking participants to list who had discovered the adolescent and their corresponding reaction on the same 10-point scale described above.

Questions 21 through 25 assessed different self-labeling methods. Questions 21 and 22 provided open-ended responses, asking adolescents to use their own words to describe how they viewed their sexual orientation and how they communicated this to others. The open-ended responses were included in an attempt to represent the social constructionist perspective that questions the accuracy of fixed labels of sexual orientation. Questions 23 and 24 also assessed labeling of sexual orientation by providing traditional labels from which adolescents could choose. These were included to examine associations among traditional labels and continuous or open-ended labels of sexual

orientation. Finally, question 25 assessed the age at which participants first thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1989) includes 10 items assessing global self-esteem. The items are answered on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, agree, disagree, 4 = strongly disagree) and are averaged to create a global score of self-esteem. Example questions include: "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others," and, "At times I think I am no good at all." Positively worded items are reverse scored so that higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Psychometric properties (Hagborg, 1993; Rosenberg) are generally acceptable. Rosenberg demonstrated the RSES concurrent validity comparing its relationship to depressive affect, psychosomatic symptoms, nurses' ratings, peer ratings, and a number of other constructs. Additionally, Hagborg compared the RSES to nine separate self-esteem domains to determine the unidimensional nature of the RSES. Hagborg found that the RSES was highly correlated with other measures of self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha was .91 for participants in this study.

Relational Assessment Questionnaire. The Relational Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ) is a 30-item self-report questionnaire that assesses different areas of romantic relationship functioning (Snell & Finney, 1993). The items are answered on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = Not at all characteristic of me, 2 = Slightly characteristic of me, 3 = Somewhat characteristic of me, 4 = Moderately characteristic of me, 5 = Very characteristic of me). Three different components of relationship functioning are assessed: relational self-esteem, relational depression, and relational-preoccupation. Relational-esteem is scored from 7-items (1, 4, 5, 13, 19, 28, 29) related to the tendency

to positively evaluate one's capacity to relate intimately to another person (e.g., "I am a good partner for an intimate relationship"). Relational-depression is scored from 10-items (2, 7, 8, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22, 25, 26) related to the tendency to feel depressed about the status of one's intimate relationships (e.g., "I am disappointed about the quality of my close relationship"). Finally, relational-preoccupation is scored from 10-items (2, 7, 8, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22, 25, 26) related to the tendency to be highly obsessed with thoughts about intimate relationships (e.g., "I think about intimate relationships all the time"). For each of the scales some items are reversed coded and items are summed so that higher scores on the RAQ subscales correspond to greater relational-esteem, depression, and preoccupation. Assessment of convergent and discriminant validity of the RAQ found that the three relational indexes were related in predictable ways to relationship involvement and attraction. Snell and Finney (1993) observed Cronbach's alphas for relational esteem, depression, and preoccupation of .81, .88, and .85, respectively, with 8-week test-retest reliabilities of .71, .73, and .70. Cronbach's alpha for the three subscales was .80, .89, and .89, respectively, for participants in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results section is divided into three primary sections that include identity development, identity disclosure, and identity exploration. Analyses for each section are presented separately, addressing specific questions in the order outlined in the objective and purposes section.

Identity Development

1a. Analyses were conducted to determine if differences exist between males and females and middle and late adolescents in self-identification using either traditional labels or scores on continuous measures of heterosexual attraction and homosexual attraction. Table 2 summarizes the number and percentages of traditional labels of sexual orientation for biological sex and age. Additionally, means and standard deviations are presented for continuous ratings of same- and opposite-sex attraction by biological sex and age. A majority of males identified as gay. More females than males identified as straight and bisexual and approximately equal numbers of middle and late adolescents identified with each label. With regard to ratings of continuous scales of sexual attraction, males demonstrated a skewed distribution rating high homosexual attraction and low heterosexual attraction while females rated both attractions in the middle of the continuum. Middle and late adolescents showed similar trends in continuous ratings with homosexual attraction being rated slightly higher than the midpoint and heterosexual attraction rated slightly lower than the midpoint.

Table 2

Percentages and Means of Male and Female and Middle and Late Adolescents Self-

Labeling Using Dichotomous and Continuous Variables (N = 82)

Categorical variables <i>N</i> , (%)	Male	Female	Middle	Late	Total
Gay/lesbian	30 (83.3)	18 (39.1)	18 (51.4)	30 (63.8)	48 (58)
Straight	3 (8.3)	11 (23.9)	5 (14.3)	9 (19.1)	14 (17)
Bisexual	2 (5.6)	13 (28.3)	9 (25.7)	6 (12.8)	15 (18)
Questioning/other	1 (2.8)	4 (8.7)	3 (8.6)	2 (4.3)	5 (7)
Continuous variables <i>M</i> , (<i>SD</i>)					
Homosexual attraction	8.4 (2.6)	6.1 (3.4)	6.8 (3.5)	7.4 (3.1)	7.1 (3.3)
Heterosexual attraction	2.8 (2.4)	5.5 (3.3)	4.6 (3.4)	4.0 (3.2)	4.3 (3.2)

Two two-way contingency table analyses were conducted to evaluate differences between males and females and middle (i.e., high school students) and late adolescents/emerging adults (i.e., posthigh school through 21 years) in self-labeling using traditional labels of sexual orientation (i.e., straight, gay/lesbian, bisexual). For the first chi square, the two variables were biological sex and identified traditional label.

Biological sex and traditional labels were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (2, $N = 77$) = 15.12, $p < .01$, $V = .443$, with males being more likely than chance to identify as gay and females being more likely to identify as straight or bisexual. For the second chi square, the two variables were age (i.e., middle vs. late adolescents) and identified traditional label. Age and traditional labels were not found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (2, $N = 77$) = 2.62, $p = .27$, $V = .185$.

Independent-sample *t* tests were conducted to evaluate if differences existed for biological sex and age on continuous ratings of homosexual and heterosexual attraction.

The test comparing males and females was significant for both homosexual attraction, $t(75) = 3.10, p = .001, d = .698$, and heterosexual attraction, $t(75) = -3.90, p < .001, d = -.866$. Neither homosexual attraction, $t(79) = -.66, p = .51, d = -.158$, nor heterosexual attraction, $t(79) = .58, p = .56, d = .150$, was significant for differences between middle and late adolescents.

1b. Analyses were run to identify patterns of association among adolescents' self-labeling of sexual orientation and reports of sexual attraction, sexual behaviors, and romantic experiences. Table 3 presents percentages for same- and opposite-sex attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences among adolescents who identify as gay/lesbian, straight, and bisexual. Due to the distribution of experiences across the groups, two-way contingency analyses were not possible because the assumption of an expected value of at least 5 in each cell was violated for many cells. Examination of the table shows general trends indicating that a majority of those who identified as gay/lesbian report same-sex crushes currently, a majority of bisexual respondents reported having both same- and opposite-sex crushes currently, and a majority of those who were straight reported having opposite-sex crushes. Additionally, a majority of gay/lesbians reported having had an opposite-sex crush at least once in their life and a small minority of straight respondents reported having had a same-sex crush at least once in their life, in the past year, and currently.

Similar trends are evident in dating, romantic, and sexual behaviors among these three groups. A majority of gay/lesbian respondents reported dating the same-sex in a group and individually as well as going steady with the same-sex in the last year or currently, and a majority identified as having participated in group and individual dating

Table 3

*Percentages of Reported Attractions and Behaviors With Same- and Opposite-Sex**Partners in Individuals Who Self-Label as Gay/Lesbian, Straight, and Bisexual (N = 82)*

Experiences / behaviors	Same-sex			Opposite-sex		
	G/L	Straight	Bi	G/L	Straight	Bi
Crush						
Never	0.0	78.6	0.0	20.8	0.0	0.0
At least once in my life	0.0	7.1	6.7	64.6	0.0	0.0
At least once in the past year	12.5	7.1	13.3	8.3	7.1	46.7
Currently	87.5	7.1	73.3	2.1	92.9	53.3
Group date						
Never	12.5	85.7	20.0	18.8	14.3	20.0
At least once in my life	8.3	7.1	20.0	52.1	0.0	26.7
At least once in the past year	27.1	7.1	26.7	20.8	28.6	20.0
Currently	52.1	0.0	33.3	4.2	57.1	33.3
Individual date						
Never	8.3	92.9	13.3	33.3	14.3	40.0
At least once in my life	0.0	7.1	26.7	45.8	7.1	20.0
At least once in the past year	33.3	0.0	26.7	14.6	21.4	20.0
Currently	58.3	0.0	33.3	2.1	57.1	20.0
Gone steady						
Never	10.4	92.9	13.3	50.0	14.3	26.7
At least once in my life	4.2	7.1	33.3	33.3	7.1	26.7
At least once in the past year	39.6	0.0	13.3	10.4	35.7	26.7
Currently	45.8	0.0	40.0	2.1	42.9	20.0
Affectionate behaviors						
Never	2.1	42.9	6.7	16.7	0.0	0.0
At least once in my life	2.1	42.9	6.7	60.4	14.3	33.3
At least once in the past year	29.2	14.3	33.3	10.4	14.3	40.0
Currently	66.7	0.0	53.3	8.3	71.4	26.7
Petting						
Never	6.3	78.6	13.3	47.9	7.1	20.0
At least once in my life	4.2	7.1	20.0	37.5	7.1	33.3
At least once in the past year	39.6	7.1	20.0	8.3	42.9	20.0
Currently	50.0	7.1	46.7	2.1	42.9	26.7

(table continues)

Experiences / behavior	Same-sex			Opposite-sex		
	G/L	Straight	Bi	G/L	Straight	Bi
Sexual intercourse						
Never	12.5	85.7	33.3	68.8	42.9	60.0
At least once in my life	6.3	14.3	13.3	14.6	7.1	13.3
At least once in the past year	29.2	0.0	26.7	10.4	28.6	13.3
Currently	52.1	0.0	26.7	2.1	21.4	13.3
Saying "I love you"						
Never	10.4	57.1	13.3	54.2	21.4	46.7
At least once in my life	6.3	21.4	13.3	22.9	7.1	20.0
At least once in the past year	33.3	0.0	20.0	12.5	21.4	20.0
Currently	50.0	21.4	53.3	6.3	50.0	13.3

with an opposite-sex partner (identifying this as once in a lifetime, in the past year, or currently). Bisexual respondents reported an approximately equal frequency of dating in groups and individually with both same- and opposite-sex partners. A majority of bisexuals also reported going steady with both same- and opposite-sex partners in the last year or currently; however, a higher proportion were currently going steady with a same-sex partner. A large majority of straight respondents reported group and individually dating opposite-sex partners; however, unlike their gay/lesbian peers only a small minority reported having been on a group or individual date with a same-sex partner in the past with no one in this group reporting current same-sex dating in a group or individually or going steady.

In regards to sexual behaviors, a majority of gay/lesbian adolescents reported affectionate behaviors, petting, and sexual intercourse with a same-sex partner in the past year or currently. A majority of these participants reported affectionate behaviors with the opposite-sex at least once in their lifetime and a minority of participants reported

petting and sexual intercourse with opposite-sex partners once in their life, the past year, and one respondent reported currently. A majority of bisexual participants reported affectionate behaviors and petting with same- and opposite-sex partners in the past year or currently with more adolescents reporting these behaviors as being currently engaged in with a same-sex partner. A majority of bisexual participants reported same-sex sexual intercourse in the past year or currently, while a minority reported opposite-sex sexual intercourse as occurring once in the past year and currently. A majority of straight respondents reported affectionate behaviors, petting, and sexual intercourse with an opposite-sex partner once in their lifetime, the past year, or currently. A majority of straight respondents reported affectionate behaviors with a same-sex partner at least once in their lifetime or the past year, while a minority reported petting and sexual intercourse with a same-sex partner at least once in their life.

Finally, a majority of gay/lesbian respondents reported saying "I love you" to a same-sex partner in the last year and currently with only a minority reporting saying this to an opposite-sex partner in the past or currently. A majority of bisexual respondents reported saying "I love you" to a same-sex partner in the last year and currently, and a minority reported saying this to an opposite-sex partner in the past year or currently. A majority of straight respondents reported saying "I love you" in the past year or currently to an opposite-sex partner, and a minority reported saying this to a same-sex partner once in their lifetime as well as currently. As expected, overall trends in the table suggest that gay/lesbian respondents' attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences are targeted toward same-sex partners, bisexuals are divided between same- and opposite-sex partners with a slightly higher rate of engagement with same-sex partners across romantic and

sexual behaviors, and straight adolescents are more likely to direct their romantic and sexual interests toward opposite-sex partners. However, within each group, some individuals participate in both same- and opposite-sex romantic and sexual experiences regardless of their sexual orientation.

Table 4 provides a summary of means and standard deviations for level of homosexual and heterosexual attraction by groups according to personal labels of sexual orientation. Percentages for same-sex attraction and behavior as well as mean age of onset are also presented. Those identifying as straight reported low homosexual attraction and high heterosexual attraction. Self-identified gay and lesbians reported opposite trends with high homosexual attraction and low heterosexual attraction. Bisexuals reported both homosexual and heterosexual attraction in the middle range on the continuums with homosexual attraction being rated, on average, slightly higher. All self-identified gay/lesbian and bisexual individuals reported being attracted to the same-sex with similar average age of onset of 11 years. A small percentage of self-labeled straight individuals reported experiencing same-sex attraction with a 5-year later mean onset compared to the other groups. Additionally, a majority of gay/lesbian and bisexual participants reported engaging in same-sex sexual behavior with both groups reporting the mean age of onset at 14 years. The same percentage of straight participants who identified same-sex attraction reported same-sex sexual behavior and the average age of onset preceded the average age of onset of same-sex attraction by over 2 years.

One-way analyses of variance were conducted to evaluate the relationships between traditional labels of sexual orientation and ratings on continuous measures of heterosexual and homosexual attraction. The independent variable, sexual orientation,

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Homosexual and Heterosexual Attractions and Behaviors Including Age of Onset (N=77).

Attractions and behaviors	Gay/Lesbian (N = 48)	Straight (N = 14)	Bisexual (N = 15)
Homosexual attraction, mean (SD)	9.19 (1.02)	1.21 (.57)	6.67 (2.35)
Heterosexual attraction, mean (SD)	2.29 (1.69)	9.86 (.36)	5.00 (1.73)
Have you been attracted to same-sex	100%	21.4%	100%
Mean age of onset	11 (3.3)	16 (1.0)	11.9 (4.0)
Engaged in same-sex sexual behavior	97.9 %	21.4%	93.3%
Mean age of onset	14.4 (2.9)	13.7 (4.9)	14.7 (2.9)

included three levels: gay/lesbian, bisexual, and straight. The dependent variables were the ratings on the two continuous measures of attraction. The ANOVAs were significant for both heterosexual attraction, $F(2, 76) = 196.4, p < .001$, and homosexual attraction, $F(2, 76) = 131.7, p < .001$. Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. A significant Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated; Games-Howell test was used for post hoc comparison, a test that does not assume equal variances among the three groups. There were significant differences in the means between all three groups on continuous measures of attraction. Homosexual attraction pairwise comparisons follow: straight and gay/lesbian, $MD -7.97, p < .01, d = 9.58$; straight and bisexual, $MD -5.45, p < .01, d = 3.19$; and gay/lesbian and bisexual, $MD 5.52, p < .01, d = -1.39$. Heterosexual attraction

pairwise comparisons follow: straight vs. gay/lesbian, $MD\ 7.67, p < .01, d = 6.19$; straight vs. bisexual, $MD\ 4.86, p < .01, d = -3.88$; and gay/lesbian vs., bisexual, $MD\ -2.71, p < .01, d = 1.58$.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate differences between sexual orientation labels and same-sex attraction and behaviors. Sexual orientation and same-sex attraction was found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2 (2, N = 77) 57.8, p < .001, V = .866$. Sexual orientation and same-sex behavior were also found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2 (2, N = 77) 46.6, p < .001, V = .778$. Again, trends are similar to those stated above with those identifying as gay/lesbian or bisexual more likely than those identifying as straight to report same-sex attraction and behavior. These results must be viewed with caution as two cells in each analysis violated the assumption of an expected count of five.

In addition to continuum and dichotomous questions for reporting sexual orientation, participants were asked to answer "What word(s) would best describe the way you see your sexual orientation?" Answers were reviewed and combined thematically. Four different patterns emerged from participant's response. Sixty-one percent of participants reported a traditional mainstream label (e.g., gay, lesbian, straight). Fourteen percent reported themes of independence from being understood or categorized according to their sexual orientation (e.g., "It's an aspect of my life that does not define who I am"). Ten percent describe seeing their sexual orientation in a negative way (e.g., "conflicting," "challenging"). Ten percent used words or phrases that denoted a positive theme in regards to their sexual orientation (e.g., "pile of gay," "here and queer," "normal"). Five percent did not respond to this item.

Participants were also asked to answer “What word(s) do you use to describe your sexual orientation to others?” Some similarities in patterns were observed; however, a new theme emerged among these responses. Seventy-eight percent of participants reported a traditional mainstream label. Six percent reported responses reflecting views that their sexual orientation was not a choice and normal (e.g., “who I am”). Six percent reported that they describe their sexual orientation to others as not defining who they are (e.g., “It’s not who I am; it is what I prefer”). Two percent used a positive theme when describing it while 1% used a negative theme when describing their sexual orientation to another. Six percent of participants did not respond to this question.

Identity Disclosure

2a. Analyses were conducted to identify if differences existed between middle and late adolescents or between males and females in their reports of their histories of self-disclosure and discovery. Table 5 presents percentages for middle and late adolescents’ purposeful disclosure of sexual identity as well as accidental discovery. A majority of both middle and late adolescents had purposefully disclosed their sexual orientation. Less than half of middle adolescents had been accidentally discovered compared to a majority of late adolescents whose sexual orientation had been accidentally discovered.

Table 6 presents percentages for males and females purposeful disclosure of sexual identity as well as accidental discovery. A higher proportion of males had purposely disclosed their sexual orientation compared to females. Additionally, a majority of males had been accidentally discovered whereas only half of female participants had been.

Table 5

Percentages for Sexual Orientation Being Disclosed or Discovered (N = 79)

Disclosure type	Middle adolescents	Late adolescents
Has your sexual orientation been:	(N = 36)	(N = 43)
Purposely disclosed	83.3	82.2
Not disclosed	16.7	17.8
Accidentally discovered	45.7	76.7
Not discovered	54.3	23.2

Table 6

Percentages for Sexual Orientation Being Disclosed or Discovered (N = 82)

Disclosure type	Male	Female
Has your sexual orientation been:	(N = 36)	(N = 46)
Purposely disclosed	91.7	76.1
Not disclosed	8.3	23.9
Accidentally discovered	80.0	50.0
Not discovered	20.0	50.0

A series of two-way contingency table analyses were conducted to evaluate whether age or biological sex accounted for differences in purposeful disclosure or accidental discovery. Age was not found to be significantly related to purposeful disclosure, Pearson χ^2 , (1, N = 82) = .34, p = .56, V = .064, but was found to be significantly related to accidental discovery, Pearson χ^2 , (1, N = 74) = 4.11, p = .04, V = .240, with later adolescents more likely to have had their sexual orientation accidentally discovered.

In regards to biological sex, no significant difference was found between males and females regarding purposeful disclosure, Pearson χ^2 , (1, N = 82) = 3.46, p = .06, V =

.205. However, biological sex and accidental discovery were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (1, $N = 74$) = 5.84, $p = .02$, $V = .309$, with males being more likely to have their sexual orientation accidentally discovered.

2b. Table 7 summarizes the first 5 people that adolescents disclosed to accompanied by the mean reaction of these individuals. The table is broken into 12 categories identifying different groups targeted for disclosure. The categories are identified as mother, father, sister, brother, parent unspecified, grandparent, extended family (e.g., aunt, uncle, cousin, in-laws), friend, romantic partner, adult authority figure (e.g., therapist, religious leader, teacher), peer group, and no response. The vast majority of first and subsequent disclosures occurred to friends and the mean reactions across disclosures were consistently rated as highly accepting. Mothers were the next most frequently first person disclosed to, as well as ranking as one of the highest among subsequent disclosures. Mean reactions for mothers were lower than friends but remained in the acceptance range. Sisters were the next most frequently disclosed to group and had higher mean rates of acceptance than mothers. In regards to immediate family, fathers and brothers were the least likely to be disclosed to and their mean reactions showed variability with fathers' mean scores ranging from the middle of acceptance and rejection to highly accepting and brothers mean scores ranking from totally rejecting to totally accepting. The people least likely to be disclosed to were extended family members and within this group, reactions ranged from totally rejecting to totally accepting.

2c. Table 8 presents the five most important people to whom the adolescents had chosen not to disclose their sexual orientation, accompanied by the mean predicted reaction for this group. The table includes the same groups as above with the exception of

Table 7

Percentages of Those Disclosed To and the Means of Reported Reactions to Disclosures (N = 82)

Person you've disclosed to, <i>N</i> (<i>M</i>)		First person (reaction)	Second person (reaction)	Third person (reaction)	Forth person (reaction)	Fifth person (reaction)
Mother	Range 1-10	8 (7.9)	7 (7.1)	11 (7.3)	10 (6.2)	4 (6.5)
Father	Range 1-10	0 (N/A)	4 (6.5)	8 (9.1)	9 (5.0)	6 (8.0)
Sister	Range 3-10	3 (9.0)	8 (8.8)	12 (7.9)	3 (8.0)	1 (6.0)
Brother	Range 4-10	1 (1.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (5.5)	5 (9.6)	2 (9.5)
Parent unspecified	Range 5-10	1 (3.0)	1 (4.0)	1 (10.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (4.0)
Grandparent	Range 2-10	0 (N/A)	1 (9.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (7.5)	3 (4.3)
Extended family	Range 2-10	0 (N/A)	1 (10.0)	2 (10.0)	1 (2.0)	2 (10.0)
Friend	Range 1-10	55 (8.5)	43 (8.5)	27 (9.1)	25 (8.2)	28 (8.0)
Romantic partner	Range 1-10	0 (N/A)	1 (3.0)	1 (10.0)	0 (N/A)	2 (8.5)
Other adult	Range 3-10	2 (8.0)	1 (3.0)	1 (9.0)	2 (5.5)	1 (10.0)
Peer group	Range N/A	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (0.0)	1 (8.0)	0 (N/A)
	No response	12 (N/A)	14 (N/A)	16 (N/A)	23 (N/A)	31 (N/A)

Table 8

Percentages of Those Not Disclosed To and the Means of Predicted Reactions to Disclosures (N = 82)

Not disclosed to N (M)		First person (reaction)	Second person (reaction)	Third person (reaction)	Forth person (reaction)	Fifth person (reaction)
Mother	Range 1-9	14 (4.2)	1 (1.0)	1 (8.0)	1 (3.0)	0 (N/A)
Father	Range 1-7	8 (2.2)	12 (4.2)	2 (1.0)	1 (3.0)	1 (1.0)
Sister	Range 1-8	2 (5.5)	3 (6.0)	1 (8.0)	1 (7.0)	0 (N/A)
Brother	Range 2-9	2 (8.5)	1 (4.0)	5 (4.6)	2 (5.0)	1 (2.0)
Grandparent	Range 1-9	15 (4.2)	8 (5.0)	8 (3.1)	7 (2.0)	6 (2.0)
Extended family	Range 1-9	4 (4.8)	8 (6.1)	11 (3.6)	11 (3.1)	4 (4.3)
Friend	Range 1-10	4 (3.8)	6 (5.7)	3 (4.6)	4 (7.5)	7 (4.6)
Romantic partner	Range N/A	1 (8.0)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Other adult	Range 1-4	0 (N/A)	2 (3.0)	1 (1.0)	0 (N/A)	1 (3.0)
No response		32 (N/A)	41 (N/A)	50 (N/A)	55 (N/A)	62 (N/A)

parents unspecified and peer group, which were not reported by any participants in the study as an important person not disclosed to. Approximately one third of the sample did not report any important individuals that they had not disclosed to and the majority of individuals listed no more than two individuals to whom they had not yet disclosed their sexual orientation. Compared to those disclosed to, Table 8 shows an opposite trend. Extended family members were the most consistently identified group to whom adolescents had not disclosed, with almost all predicted mean reactions within the rejection range. Among extended family, grandparents were specifically rated as the group most likely not disclosed to across the list of important individuals not disclosed to. Mothers and fathers were the next most frequent individuals not chosen for disclosure, with all predicted reactions but one in the rejecting range. Friends were the next most important group to whom adolescents had not disclosed and predicted reactions among this group were the most favorable of all groups; reactions ranged from mildly rejecting to moderately accepting. Brothers and sisters were less consistently listed as those to whom participants had not disclosed, with brothers showing slightly higher rates and more rejecting predicted reactions than sisters.

2d. Table 9 presents a summary of the first five people who accidentally discovered adolescents' sexual orientation and their reactions to the discovery. The table includes the same groups as above with the exception of romantic partner, which was not reported by any participant as someone who accidentally discovered their sexual orientation. A friend was the most likely person to first and subsequently accidentally discover sexual orientation and the reaction ranged from mildly rejecting to highly accepting. Mothers were the next person most likely to accidentally discover sexual

Table 9

Percentages of Those Who Unintentionally Discovered Sexual Orientation and Means of Reported Reactions to Discovery (N = 82)

Discovered by <i>N</i> (<i>M</i>)		First person (reaction)	Second person (reaction)	Third person (reaction)	Forth person (reaction)	Fifth person (reaction)
Mother	Range	12 (5.6)	1 (3.0)	0 (N/A)	1 (3.0)	0 (N/A)
1-10						
Father	Range 1-9	1 (9.0)	4 (3.3)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	1 (3.0)
Sister	Range 3-8	5 (5.4)	2 (5.0)	2 (4.5)	1 (6.0)	0 (N/A)
Brother	Range 3-10	2 (10.0)	2 (6.5)	4 (5.0)	1 (6.0)	1 (5.0)
Parent unspecified	Range N/A	1 (1.0)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Grandparent	Range 1-8	2 (4.0)	2 (7.0)	0 (N/A)	1 (8.0)	0 (N/A)
Extended family	Range 4-10	4 (8.3)	5 (6.0)	3 (5.3)	2 (5.0)	3 (9.0)
Friend	Range 1-10	16 (6.1)	12 (8.0)	8 (6.4)	5 (4.8)	3 (7.3)
Other adult	Range 2-10	1 (2.0)	1 (10.0)	1 (10.0)	1 (5.0)	0 (N/A)
Peer group	Range 4-5	0 (N/A)	1 (5.0)	1 (4.0)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
No response		38 (N/A)	52 (N/A)	63 (N/A)	70 (N/A)	74 (N/A)

orientation and their reactions ranged from moderately rejecting to neutral. Sisters and brothers represent the next most common groups to accidentally discover and shared similar reaction patterns that ranged within the neutral range of reaction. Extended Family members were the next most frequently listed and demonstrated neutral to highly accepting reactions to discovery. Finally, fathers and other adult figures are among the least likely to accidentally discover sexual orientation with variability in reaction ranging from rejecting to totally accepting.

2e. An independent samples *t* test was conducted to identify if differences existed between adolescent sexual minorities who were unintentionally discovered and those who had not been in levels of self-esteem. The current analysis was based on comparison between those who reported a discovery history versus those who had never been unintentionally discovered; however, it is important to note that those who reported being discovered could also have a history of purposeful disclosures as well. The test was not significant comparing those whose sexual orientation had been accidentally discovered to those who had not had their sexual orientation accidentally discovered, indicating that self-esteem is not impacted by the inadvertent disclosure of sexual orientation, $t(77) = -0.74, p = .46, d = -.172$.

Finally, respondents who reported having their sexual orientation discovered were asked to identify how they were discovered ("Someone I disclosed to told," "I was discovered engaging in romantic or sexual behaviors with the same-sex," "I was confronted," "Other"). Participants who had been discovered by multiple individuals or in different manners had the option of noting more than one response on this item. A majority of those who had been discovered reported that their sexual orientation had been

accidentally disclosed by someone to whom they had disclosed ($N = 36$). The next most frequent response was being confronted ($N = 16$), and a small minority reported being caught engaging in same-sex sexual or romantic behaviors ($N = 7$). A group of participants reported "other" indicating being discovered in a different way than the categories above ($N = 12$). Some of the alternate ways discovered included others reading letters, journals, or text messages that revealed the adolescents' sexual orientation.

In order to identify motivation and intent for disclosure participants were asked to describe their most important reason for disclosing. Three main themes emerged from these responses. Forty-five percent identified a theme of needing to disclose for either themselves or because of closeness to another person (e.g., "I needed to be able to share with someone who I really was," "My sister and I were close and I felt she would understand best."). Eighteen percent identified a theme of sameness or attraction to the person to whom they disclosed (e.g., "She was going through the same confusion or experimentation and she was my best friend," "I was attracted to him and he was my best friend"). Ten percent reported a theme of wanting to improve their lives and/or for acceptance (e.g., "Not to hide my feelings and to feel better about myself," "I wanted to feel accepted"). Four percent provided miscellaneous responses that did not fit into a specific category (e.g., being forced, being curious), and 23% did not respond to this question.

Participants were also asked to describe their most important reason for not disclosing. Four categories emerged from these responses. Forty-two percent identified fear and rejection as the major theme for not disclosing. These fears were broad and included fear of loss in emotional, social, and financial support as well as fearing for the

well being of others (e.g., “fear of disappointing,” “she would totally reject me,” “fear, health concerns for my father,” “fear of unknown consequences”). Six percent reported not disclosing due to religious considerations (e.g., “Their beliefs make them think that something would have to be wrong with me and I can’t change”). Six percent reported being prohibited to disclose (e.g., “My parents won’t let me”). Five percent reported personal reasons for not disclosing (e.g., “lack self-confidence,” “personal reasons”). Forty-one percent did not answer this item.

Identity Exploration

Table 10 provides means and standard deviations for scores for self-esteem, relational esteem, relational depression, and relational preoccupation for males and females and for middle and late adolescents.

3a. An evaluation of differences between middle and late adolescents and between males and females in romantic and sexual relationships/experiences was conducted. This was done by identifying specific attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences with both same- and opposite-sex partners in middle and late adolescents and male and females.

Sixteen two-way contingency tables were analyzed to evaluate whether crushes, behaviors, and romantic experiences were related to age. Age—middle (i.e., those in high school) and late (i.e., those graduate from high school) adolescence—was paired with dichotomous responses (yes/no) for 8 different behaviors (e.g., crush, group date, individual date, gone steady, affectionate behavior, petting, sexual intercourse, saying “I love you”) with same-sex and opposite-sex partners (see Appendix C for summary of all chi square results). Among the 16 analyses, 14 of the chi squares were not significant.

Table 10

*Means and Standard Deviations for Relationship Style on Relational and Self-Esteem**Outcomes (N = 82)*

Psychosocial outcomes	Male (N = 36)	Female (N = 46)	Middle (N = 35)	Late (N = 47)
Self esteem mean (SD)	3.0 (0.7)	3.1 (0.6)	3.0 (0.5)	3.0 (0.7)
Relational esteem mean (SD)	24.2 (5.7)	23.3 (5.9)	22.8 (6.3)	24.3 (5.3)
Relational Depression mean (SD)	24.0 (8.7)	21.8 (8.8)	24.0 (8.7)	22.0 (8.8)
Relational Preoccupation mean (SD)	33.3 (8.2)	28.4 (7.6)	30.5 (7.1)	30.6 (8.9)

Age and opposite-sex group dating were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 80$) = 17.86, $p < .01$, $V = .473$, with middle adolescents being more likely to report never going on an opposite-sex group date. Also, age and saying "I love you" to the opposite-sex was also found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 80$) = 8.58, $p = .03$, $V = .328$, with late adolescents being more likely to report saying "I love you" to the opposite-sex at least once in their lifetime. Examination of the Cramer's V effect sizes demonstrates small effect sizes for all 8 behaviors with same-sex partners and moderate effect sizes only for opposite-sex group date and opposite-sex saying "I love you" (see table in Appendix C).

Table 11 presents percentages for same- and opposite-sex crushes, behaviors, and romantic experiences for middle (i.e., those in high school) and late (i.e., those graduated from high school) adolescents. A descriptive review of the table shows similar trends in

Table 11

*Percentages of Reported Attractions and Behaviors with Same- and Opposite-Sex**Partners in Middle and Late Adolescents (N = 81)*

<i>Experiences / behaviors</i>	<i>Same-sex</i>		<i>Opposite-sex</i>	
	<i>Middle (N = 36)</i>	<i>Late (N = 45)</i>	<i>Middle (N = 36)</i>	<i>Late (N = 45)</i>
<i>Crush</i>				
Never	11.1	15.6	8.3	15.6
At least once in my life	11.1	0.0	36.1	44.4
At least once in the past year	5.6	17.8	22.2	8.9
Currently	69.4	66.7	33.3	26.7
<i>Group Date</i>				
Never	22.2	31.1	36.1	4.4
At least once in my life	16.7	6.7	19.4	48.9
At least once in the past year	25.0	26.7	22.2	26.7
Currently	36.1	35.6	22.2	15.6
<i>Individual Date</i>				
Never	27.8	24.4	44.4	20.0
At least once in my life	13.9	2.2	25.0	37.8
At least once in the past year	22.2	31.1	16.7	17.8
Currently	36.1	42.2	13.9	20.0
<i>Gone Steady</i>				
Never	27.8	31.1	41.7	37.8
At least once in my life	8.3	11.1	27.8	26.7
At least once in the past year	25.0	28.9	19.4	15.6
Currently	38.9	28.9	11.1	15.6
<i>Affectionate Behaviors</i>				
Never	11.1	11.1	13.9	6.7
At least once in my life	13.9	8.9	47.2	46.7
At least once in the past year	19.4	35.6	13.9	17.8
Currently	55.6	44.4	25.0	24.4
<i>Petting</i>				
Never	19.4	22.2	41.7	31.1
At least once in my life	8.3	8.9	22.2	35.6
At least once in the past year	30.6	33.3	19.4	15.6
Currently	41.7	35.6	16.7	13.3

(table continues)

Experiences / behaviors	Same-sex		Opposite-sex	
	Middle (N = 36)	Late (N = 45)	Middle (N = 36)	Late (N = 45)
Sexual Intercourse				
Never	38.9	26.7	58.3	66.7
At least once in my life	8.3	11.1	13.9	8.9
At least once in the past year	13.9	28.9	19.4	8.9
Currently	38.9	33.3	8.3	11.1
Saying "I love you"				
Never	16.7	24.4	52.8	40.0
At least once in my life	16.7	8.9	22.2	20.0
At least once in the past year	25.0	22.2	19.4	11.1
Currently	41.7	44.4	5.6	24.4

the percentages of middle and late adolescents experiencing same- and opposite-sex crushes with the majority of both groups currently experiencing same-sex crushes, while a minority reported current opposite-sex crushes. Both middle and late adolescents reported equal rates for same-sex group and individual dating with most engaging in same-sex dating at least once in the past year or currently; however, a greater proportion of middle adolescents had never been on an opposite-sex group date compared to late adolescents. Middle and late adolescents reported similar rates of participation and activity in same-sex going steady, affectionate behaviors, petting, and sexual intercourse with the majority of both groups participating in each of these at least once in the last year or currently. Opposite trends were seen in these categories with opposite-sex partners, where the majority of both middle and late adolescents had only engaged in these behaviors once in their lifetime or never at all. Finally, middle and late adolescents also demonstrated similar rates of saying "I love you" to same-sex partners in the last year or currently; however, more variability between these groups was seen with regard

to saying “I love you” to an opposite-sex partner, with a greater proportion of late adolescents reporting that they are currently saying that compared to middle adolescents.

Table 12 presents percentages for same- and opposite-sex crushes, behaviors, and romantic experiences for males and females. Sixteen two-way contingency tables were analyzed to evaluate whether crushes, behaviors, and romantic experiences were related to biological sex (see Appendix C for summary of all chi-square results). Biological sex was paired with 8 different behaviors (e.g., crush, group date, individual date, gone steady, affectionate behavior, petting, sexual intercourse, saying “I love you”) for same-sex- and opposite-sex partners. Among these outcomes, 12 of the analyses were not significant. Gender and opposite-sex crush were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 80$) = 19.59, $p < .01$, $V = .495$. Three other outcomes were found to be significant; however, these results must be viewed with caution as all violated the assumption of an expected value of five in each cell. Each of these test are as follows: gender and same-sex dating alone were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 80$) = 9.53, $p = .02$, $V = .341$. Gender and same-sex sexual intercourse were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 82$) = 9.80, $p = .02$, $V = .346$. Finally, gender and opposite-sex sexual intercourse were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 , (3, $N = 80$) = 8.09, $p = .04$, $V = .318$. Overall effect sizes demonstrate moderate effect sizes for four same-sex behaviors and three moderate to large effect sizes for opposite-sex behaviors. In regards to same-sex behaviors, moderate relationships were found for individual dating, going steady, petting, and sexual intercourse. In regards to opposite-sex behaviors, moderate relationships were found for group date and sexual intercourse. A strong relationship was found for opposite-sex crush.

Table 12

*Percentages of Reported Attractions and Behaviors with Same and Opposite-Sex**Partners in Male and Female Adolescents (N = 82)*

<u>Experiences / behaviors</u>	<u>Same-sex</u>		<u>Opposite-sex</u>	
	Male (N = 36)	Female (N = 45)	Male (N = 36)	Female (N = 45)
Crush				
Never	8.3	17.4	19.4	6.5
At least once in my life	0.0	8.7	58.3	26.1
At least once in the past year	11.1	13.0	5.6	23.9
Currently	77.8	60.9	11.1	43.5
Group Date				
Never	27.8	26.1	13.9	21.7
At least once in my life	5.6	15.2	50.0	23.9
At least once in the past year	25.0	26.1	19.4	28.3
Currently	41.7	32.6	11.1	26.1
Individual Date				
Never	16.7	32.6	30.6	30.4
At least once in my life	0.0	13.0	38.9	28.3
At least once in the past year	30.6	23.9	13.9	19.6
Currently	52.8	30.4	11.1	21.7
Gone Steady				
Never	22.2	34.8	47.2	32.6
At least once in my life	2.8	15.2	27.8	26.1
At least once in the past year	38.9	17.4	11.1	23.9
Currently	36.1	32.6	8.3	17.4
Affectionate Behaviors				
Never	8.3	13.0	13.9	6.5
At least once in my life	5.6	15.2	50.0	43.5
At least once in the past year	30.6	26.1	13.9	19.6
Currently	55.6	45.7	16.7	30.4
Petting				
Never	11.1	28.3	47.2	26.1
At least once in my life	2.8	13.0	27.8	32.6
At least once in the past year	41.7	23.9	11.1	21.7
Currently	44.4	34.8	8.3	19.6

(table continues)

Experiences / behaviors	Same-sex		Opposite-sex	
	Male (N = 36)	Female (N = 45)	Male (N = 36)	Female (N = 45)
Sexual Intercourse				
Never	16.7	43.5	72.2	54.3
At least once in my life	5.6	13.0	8.3	15.2
At least once in the past year	30.6	17.4	13.9	13.0
Currently	47.2	26.1	0.0	17.4
Saying "I love you"				
Never	16.7	23.9	41.7	50.0
At least once in my life	11.1	13.0	27.8	15.2
At least once in the past year	30.6	17.4	13.9	15.2
Currently	41.7	45.7	11.1	19.6

A descriptive review of Table 12 shows similar proportions of males and females demonstrating same-sex crushes in the past year or currently; however, a significantly higher rate of females reported an opposite-sex crush at least once in the last year or currently. Similar trends are seen for same-sex group and individual dating as well as going steady with the same-sex among males and females with males reporting slightly, although not significantly, higher rates in the past year and currently. Additionally, throughout these behaviors a slightly higher proportion of females reported these behaviors with opposite-sex partners than did males. The same pattern continues with sexual and romantic behaviors, with similar proportions of males and females reporting affectionate behaviors (e.g., kissing, holding hands), petting, and saying "I love you." In regards to sexual intercourse, significant differences exist with a greater proportion of males in the past year or currently engaging in same-sex sexual intercourse and a greater proportion of females engaging in opposite-sex sexual intercourse in the past year or currently. Overall, the analyses of Table 12 suggest that males and females report

different histories of experience for several same- and opposite-sex sexual and romantic behaviors.

3b. The relationships among different predominant dating styles and self-esteem and relationship competence were assessed. Table 13 presents means and standard deviations for five relationship styles (i.e., close same-sex friendship, same-sex exclusively sexual, same-sex romantic relationship, heterosexual dating, and never participate in relationships) for relational esteem, relational depression, relational preoccupation, self-esteem.

Four one-way analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to evaluate associations between relationship style and the four psychosocial outcomes detailed above. The ANOVAs for relational preoccupation, $F(4, 75) = 2.07, p = .09$ and self-esteem, $F(4, 75) = 1.08, p = .38$, were not found to be significant. The ANOVA was significant for relational esteem, $F(4, 75) = 4.47, p = .003$. Sheffe post hoc tests were used to evaluate differences among means. A significant difference was found between those who engaged predominantly in either same-sex romantic relationships or heterosexual dating compared to those who do not participate in relationships. Table 14 provides a summary of all pairwise comparisons for relational esteem. Also, the ANOVA was significant for relational depression, $F(4, 75) = 2.77, p = .03$. A follow up Scheffe test was conducted to evaluate differences among means. Those not in relationships reported significantly higher rates of relational depression compared with those who reported same-sex close friends and same-sex romantic relationships. Table 14 provides a summary of all pairwise comparisons for relational depression. Examination of the Cohen's d effect sizes in Table 14 demonstrates large effect sizes for the differences

Table 13

*Means and Standard Deviations for Relationship Style on Relational and Self-Esteem**Outcomes (N = 76)*

Relationship style	Psychosocial outcomes			
	Relational esteem	Relational depression	Relational preoccupation	Self- esteem
Close same-sex friendships (N=14)	23.2 (3.6)	20.1 (5.8)	29.8 (7.7)	3.3 (.46)
Same-sex exclusively sexual (N=5)	24.8 (5.8)	24.0 (13.9)	30.6 (11.8)	3.0 (.74)
Same-sex romantic relationship (N = 40)	24.8 (5.1)	21.7 (7.7)	31.9 (6.8)	3.0 (.62)
Heterosexual dating (N = 9)	24.6 (6.1)	21.1 (10.7)	27.9 (12.0)	3.1 (.50)
Never participate in relationships (N=8)	16.3 (5.2)	31.1 (5.4)	23.5 (8.0)	2.8 (.49)

Note. Higher scores on the psychosocial subscales correspond to greater relation-esteem, relational depression, relational preoccupation, and self-esteem.

between those who reported not participating relationships and all other groups (i.e., same-sex romantic relationships, same-sex exclusive relationships, passionate friendships, and heterosexual dating), with all relationship styles having higher relational esteem compared to those who are not participating. Effect sizes for relational depression demonstrated moderate to large effect sizes for differences between those not participating in relationships and those who reported same-sex romantic relationships, passionate friendships, or heterosexual dating; again, all relationship styles reported less relational depression compared to those not participating in relationships.

Table 14

*Effect Size for Relational Esteem and Relation Depression Between Different**Relationship Types*

Relationship types	Mean difference	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Relational Esteem			
SSR-SSE	.00	1.00	.00
SSR-PF	1.58	.92	.30
SSR-HD	.24	1.00	.04
SSR-NP	8.55	>.00	1.65
SSE-PF	1.59	.99	.28
SSE-HD	.24	1.00	.04
SSE-NP	8.55	.11	1.53
PF-HD	-1.34	.97	-.24
PF-NP	6.96	.08	1.70
HD-NP	8.31	.04	1.46
Relational Depression			
SSR-SSE	-2.30	.99	-.20
SSR-PF	1.56	.93	.23
SSR-HD	.59	1.00	.06
SSR-NP	-9.43	>.00	-1.41
SSE-PF	3.86	.97	.36
SSE-HD	2.89	.99	.23
SSE-NP	-7.13	.80	-.67
PF-HD	-.97	.99	-.11
PF-NP	-11.00	>.00	-1.95
HD-NP	-10.01	.16	-1.18

Note. SSR = same-sex romantic relationship, SSE = same-sex exclusively sexual, PF = passionate friendship, HD = heterosexual dating, NP = not participating in a relationship.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to provide an empirical analysis of current theories and models of sexual minority development. Recent research has begun to investigate the social constructionist and multidimensional models of sexual identity development, but little research has been done with adolescents. The current study targeted an adolescent and young adult population to address this gap in the literature, and evaluate the efficacy of the social constructionist theory and multidimensional approach to sexual minority development. These positions reflect a conceptual understanding that sexual orientation is a complex configuration of identity, attractions, behaviors, disclosures, and interpersonal explorations, and is therefore a developmentally multifaceted process that will result in variability across individuals (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001).

This conceptualization is a break from the historical essentialist perspective and subsequent stage models that advocate for a more general and linear process that reflects a fixed trajectory for identity development, disclosure, and romantic exploration. Thus, essentialist theory and stage models represent a narrow pathway whereas social constructionist and multidimensional models suggest a broad spectrum of development. The current study emphasized examination of possible differences across gender and across age groups by investigating the areas of identity development, identity disclosure, and identity exploration.

Identity Development

Identity development is a fundamental task during adolescence and is impacted by numerous factors including the development of interpersonal and romantic relationships. This developmental process is greatly influenced by peer interaction and comparison (Furman et al., 2002); therefore, sexual minority adolescents may have additional factors to negotiate that include defining and integrating their sexual orientation into identity (Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Using a multidimensional model approach, attractions, behaviors, and identity (e.g., self-labeling) must be evaluated separately and collectively to understand the developmental process of adolescents who differ from their peers in the questioning and development of sexual orientation.

Age differences. The results of the analyses for differences between middle adolescents (i.e., high school students) and late adolescents/emerging adults (i.e., posthigh school through 21 years) in regards to how they self label using both traditional labels and continuum ratings of attraction were not found to be significant. Thus developmentally, adolescents are identifying and labeling their attractions and sexual orientation at a consistent rate throughout their adolescent years and in to their young adult lives. This finding is reflective of the trend that adolescents are now beginning to identifying their sexual orientation at earlier ages (Saltzburg, 2004). Historically, the age of recognition and disclosure was during young adulthood, which likely delayed or made difficult the rich opportunities for interpersonal and romantic development available to adolescents during their middle and high school years (D'Augelli et al., 1998). Findings that support earlier recognition in self labeling and identification are encouraging. As the age of identifying same-sex attraction and disclosure continues to lower to early and

middle adolescence, possible developmental gaps between younger and older sexual minority adolescents and young adults in self labeling, engagement in same-sex behaviors, and participation in intimate interpersonal relationships will decrease. With these trends, future research on developmental processes in sexual minorities should move away from identifying systematic differences through group classification by age and recognize that greater individual diversity may exist within these groups than across.

Biological sex differences. There were significant results of the analyses of differences between males and females in regards to how they self-label using both traditional labels and continuum ratings of attraction. In regards to identification through traditional labels, males were found to identify as gay and females more likely to label as straight or bisexual. In addition, on continuum measures of attraction, the distributions of heterosexual attraction and homosexual attraction for males were both skewed, with males reporting high levels of homosexual attraction and low levels of heterosexual attraction. In contrast, the distributions of homosexual and heterosexual attraction for females showed much broader ranges, with average ratings on both scales in the middle. Taken together, males' attraction patterns match their use of the traditional label of "gay," whereas female's variability in attraction to both sexes reflects a greater variability in traditional self-labels of sexual orientation. This suggests females are more likely to show nonexclusive attractions, thus making sexual orientation and identification a much more fluid process compared to males. Past research has documented that females are likely to demonstrate more variability and transitions throughout their lifetimes in regards to their sexual orientation and identity, which is likely a result of more fluid and nonexclusive attractions compared to males (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000).

These findings are important and provide support for the social constructionist perspective and insight for future research in this area. First, the social constructionist viewpoint provides important new ways of understanding the meaning of sexual orientation. Under this perspective, the use of categorical traditional labels such as gay, bisexual, straight are socially constructed and may, therefore, be an inadequate medium for capturing the true experience of an individual (Broido, 2000). Females may be more likely to show variability and transitions in the use of traditional labels throughout their lifetime as these labels do not accurately reflect their attractions. The picture with understanding male identity development through this theoretical perspective is more complicated. It is possible that male use of traditional sexual minority labels is more stable because these socially constructed labels fit male experience and attractions adequately. However, it may be possible that social influences impact how males conceptualize their attractions and that taking on a traditional sexual minority label may influence the level to which they commit to and report their attractions on continuous measures. Regardless of sexual orientation, stereotypical gender roles allow women a measure of flexibility and fluidity in their attractions and displayed affection toward both sexes that men are not afforded. Therefore, the differences displayed may represent unique differences between males and females or may be a result of gender role influences that constrict males' ability to demonstrate sexual lability.

Secondly, these findings are important in guiding future research in this area. Several research findings and models of identity development for sexual minority youth have primarily come from samples of gay young men. It has been recommended that sexual minority females are more similar to heterosexual females than they are to young

gay males (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Findings from gay male populations may have limited utility in being generalized to females. Also, limiting sexual minority research to those who identify as a sexual minority will likely exclude numerous females who have same-sex attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences but do not use the appropriate traditional label for inclusion. The latest research in this area also appears to acknowledge and be moving in the same direction, identifying a need to depart from past research veins and for the first time understand sexual identity development through gender as well as orientation (Savin-Williams, 2005). Understanding both heterosexual and homosexual attraction through male sexual development and female sexual development will provide more appropriate and applicable findings than grouping these two orientations into different bodies of research.

Labels versus experience. Descriptive patterns of association among adolescents' self-labeling of sexual orientation and reports of sexual attraction, sexual behaviors, and romantic experiences were expectedly consistent across groups. Individuals identifying as straight were likely to engage in attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences with opposite-sex partners whereas those identifying as gay/lesbian were engaging in these behaviors with the same-sex. Bisexuals were engaging with both opposite-sex and same-sex partners. Although these results are intuitively logical, they prompt consideration of previous models and conceptualizations that extend from the essentialist perspective. Despite criticism targeted at the inflexibility of the essentialist perspective, the general trend of these results would suggest that traditional labels may have some utility in accurately representing attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences for different sexual orientation groups (Broido, 2000). Therefore, despite a general push in the

literature and by new models to pull away from the use of traditional labels, these labels demonstrate some inherent value in classifying and reflecting different contributing aspects of sexual orientation.

Another interesting aspect regarding self-identification and labeling was demonstrated through participants' responses to the open-ended questions inquiring how adolescents describe sexual orientation in their own words. A majority of participants identified using traditional mainstream labels again suggesting that these labels have meaning and practical application for identity development. However, it is interesting to note that a subset of respondents answered in an unexpected descriptive way, refusing to use labels in regards to their sexual orientation. Within these groups, positive, negative, and normalizing themes emerged in regards to describing sexual orientation as a part of their identity; many participants, however, made it clear that their sexual orientation was not representative of their overall identity. This suggests that labels that affix meaning to sexual orientation may not be representative of all sexual minority youth (Savin-Williams, 2005). Despite this it must still be recognized that a majority of the sample did use traditional labels in response to these questions. Thus, research is needed to identify the extent to which traditional labels will maintain utility and applicability to identity development in the future.

Notwithstanding both the quantitative and open-ended results, it is important to underscore that across all three groups of sexual orientation there were reports of same- and opposite-sex attraction, affectionate and sexual behavior, and romantic experiences. Sexual minorities (i.e., gay/lesbian, bisexual) were likely to engage in these experiences with an opposite-sex partner more frequently than straight individuals were to engage in

them with a same-sex partner. These trends follow previous research that documents sexual minorities engaging in activities with opposite-sex partners for a variety of reasons which include: questioning or experimenting with sexual orientation, trying to hide or deny same-sex feelings, or lacking other alternatives for intimate relationships (Diamond et al., 1999; Zera, 1992). Less understood and researched are reports of same-sex attractions, behaviors, and romantic experiences among individuals who identify as straight. Like their sexual minority counterparts these individuals may be engaging in same-sex attractions and sexual behaviors to explore or question their sexual orientation; however, this knowledge remains a gap in the current study and literature. Future research should consider qualitatively examining motivation and intent behind attractions and engagement with same- and opposite-sex partners. Doing such would provide important information about the purpose and quality of these experiences and how they influence overall adolescent development. Taken together it seems that traditional labels do provide an ability to accurately conceptualize sexual orientation; however, a diversity of experience continues to exist and measures of attractions and behaviors beyond traditional labels are also needed to compliment and better understand when traditional labels are and are not appropriate.

Of importance and in light of these conclusions, it should be noted that the sample used for this study was obtained primarily through community centers and groups for gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents and young adults; therefore, those identifying as straight in this sample are likely different from those identifying as straight in the general population. The ability to generalize these results to others who identify as straight is difficult and must be done with caution. Additionally, it should be considered that the

nonexclusive attractions reported in this study may be a result of greater fluidity in attraction and behaviors in this sample, but not necessarily in all sexual minority women. However, past research has documented the nonexclusive nature of female attraction, thus giving plausible support for interpreting the results as possibly reflective of natural patterns among males and females in the general population (Diamond, 2003). More research is needed with larger and more diverse populations of gay/lesbian, bisexual, and straight respondents to understand if the trends reported extend beyond those participants in the current study.

Identity Disclosure

As sexual orientation becomes a prominent and important aspect of development, most adolescents consider when and with whom to share this part of their identity. Among the most important aspects of disclosure is the expected and received reaction of the person to whom one discloses (Zera, 1992). Because this reaction is such an anticipated and important event for the adolescent, understanding this process and what contributes to accepting and rejecting attitudes is the critical component of disclosure patterns. Given the significance of this event, understanding trends among different groups and individual differences provides informative data that can be instructive for those working with adolescents trying to negotiate the pathway to an accepting and positive reaction.

Age and sex differences. The results of the analyses for differences between middle and late adolescents and males and females in their reports of their histories of self-disclosure and discovery were found to be significant (for both sets of analyses) for discovery only. In regards to age differences, middle and late adolescents were equally

likely to have disclosed their sexual orientation; however, a greater proportion of late adolescents had been accidentally discovered. Accidental discovery was defined as someone inadvertently or unintentionally discovering the adolescent's sexual orientation (e.g., someone disclosed to telling, being discovered engaging in same-sex behaviors, being confronted). The primary differences between middle and late adolescents in discovery histories may stem from late adolescents having more opportunities to be discovered as they have been out longer. This hypothesis seems likely as adolescents reported the most frequent mechanism of discovery as someone who had been disclosed to telling another individual. The differences found among middle and late adolescents are striking given the mean difference of only 2 years of age between the groups. In consideration of this, further research may provide a better picture in regards to the critical component age may play in discovery histories. Thus, as adolescents develop and progress through young adulthood it is important that they and those working with them understand that more frequent disclosure may lead to greater opportunity for accidental discovery.

In regards to biological sex both males and females had equally disclosed their sexual orientation, but a greater number of males had been inadvertently or unintentionally discovered. In understanding this difference, previous research has documented that males are, in general, more likely to recognize and act on same-sex feelings than females (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Rosario et al., 1996). Like differences demonstrated across age groups, it is possible that longer or more intense engagement in this process puts males at a higher risk for discovery. Also, it has been noted that important sex differences exist between males' and females' motivation for

exploration and commitment to same-sex attractions and behaviors. For males in general, desire alone seems to be motivation enough to pursue sexual contact, whereas females are more motivated by the social context and would rarely be motivated by desire alone to pursue sexual contact with another person (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). This difference between genders may also facilitate males engaging in behaviors earlier and more frequently than females, and by increasing the rate of exposure to same-sex activity, consequently increasing the risk of discovery. This again accentuates gender differences in sexual minority development that support the importance of looking at male and female sexual development separately rather than as a combined homogenous group.

Patterns of disclosure. Descriptive patterns of association verified trends of previous research with a friend being the first disclosed to as well as a more likely target for subsequent disclosures (Savin-Williams, 1995). It has been established that reaction to disclosure is critically important in the disclosure process; thus, adolescents are most likely to choose those who they predict will offer an accepting reaction (Strommen, 1993). Findings indicate that, as a group, friends reactions were highly accepting, explaining why this is the group most frequently disclosed to and validating adolescents' capacity to choose targets of disclosure that will offer affirming and accepting responses. Unlike immediate and extended family, adolescents are able to choose their friends and may be able to talk more openly on these subjects without receiving the strong emotional responses that are more likely to come from family members. Also, adolescents are not dependent on friends for financial and other important areas of support compared to their family, thus, the cost-benefit ratio when disclosing to a friend is much lower.

The next person most frequently disclosed to was a mother, which again follows past trends in research (D'Augelli et al., 1998). On average mothers also demonstrated a high rate of acceptance, although lower than friends. An interesting piece that contributes new insight into the disclosure process is that sisters are the third most common target for disclosure and their reaction patterns were more accepting than mothers. Limited research exists on disclosure to siblings, however, initial research supported that siblings would be a potentially accepting target of disclosure (D'Augelli, 1991). However, this picture is less straightforward than generalizing to siblings as a whole. The current study found that both fathers and brothers were disclosed to at a lower rate than mothers and sisters and that reaction patterns were much more variable, ranging from totally rejecting to totally accepting. Adolescents' disclosed more frequently to female family members; perhaps due to a more stable and predictable accepting response. Future research should investigate if gender differences exist in those who are most likely to be accepting. The current data would suggest that female family members may, as a group, show less variability in response patterns, and it would be insightful if future projects examined consistency of gender response for both friend and family members.

In addition to patterns in individual and group reaction, motivations and intent for disclosing and not disclosing also provide important information. As in past research, the most common themes extracted from the open-ended responses on disclosure were that disclosure is motivated by closeness and a need for acceptance, while fear and rejection are the main components in decisions not to disclose (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Thus, those working with adolescents who are contemplating disclosure should recognize

and understand anticipated reactions before making recommendations to adolescents about disclosure choices.

The group that was disclosed to least frequently among first disclosures was grandparents and other extended family (e.g., aunt, uncle, cousin). The range of response among this group was also highly variable. Garnets and Kimmel (1993) suggested that adolescents may receive pressure from immediate family members who insist that the adolescent not disclose to other extended family. These reasons can range and may include the family not wanting to upset or hurt extended family members or the maintenance of a stable and normative image to other family members. Pressure from family, mixed with variable reactions from extended family members, may point to why this is the group least frequently disclosed to.

Adolescents showed opposite trends when considering the people most likely not disclosed to and the predicted reactions. Collapsing across the five most important individuals to whom adolescents had not disclosed, extended family members were most likely to be nominated, with grandparents being the most common. All predicted reactions were within the rejecting range. In regards to reaction patterns, those who hold more traditional and conservative views are more likely to be rejecting toward disclosure (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Typically, older individuals, such as grandparents, may be perceived as more apt to hold such traditional views that may account for the adolescent choosing not to disclose and expecting negative reactions to a disclosure. Parents were the next group most commonly not disclosed to and predicted reactions from parents were also in the rejecting range. Friends were the next common to be reported as those chosen not to disclose to, but in comparison had the most favorable

predicted reactions. Finally, siblings were less commonly reported as most important person not disclosed to, with reactions in the rejecting range more common among brothers than sisters. Overall, quantitative results suggest that the decision to disclose or not to disclose is associated with expected reactions. Friends appear to be more consistent and safer than family members in the disclosure process. Also, female family members show more stable and favorable ratings over male family members. Reactions from extended family members may be complicated by external pressures from those already disclosed to and variability in expected responses likely combines to make this group the most infrequently disclosed to.

Patterns of discovery. Because disclosure choices appear to be mediated by reactions or predicted reactions it is necessary to consider the aspect of accidental discovery. In these cases disclosure is unintentional and the predicted reaction often not processed or considered due to the unexpected nature of discovery. Discovery can happen in many different ways; however, the most likely experiences of accidental discovery occurred when individuals who had been disclosed to disclosed to someone else who was not intended by the adolescent. Other less frequent methods of discovery included confrontation or being caught engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. Each of these circumstances presents unpredictable and potentially damaging outcomes; therefore, understanding if discovery impacts adolescent identity development and subsequent formation of identity exploration is a critical component missing in the literature.

The most surprising finding in regards to discovery is the reaction patterns, which primarily ranged from neutral to accepting. In this group, friends were the most likely to accidentally discover sexual orientation, but showed similar rates of approval to those

friends who were chosen as targets of disclosure. Perhaps the most significant revelation from trends of discovery is in regards to extended family members, all of whom were neutral or positively accepting of the adolescent's sexual orientation. This information suggests that adolescents' concerns about rejecting reactions or the concerns of immediate family members about disclosure to extended family may sometimes not be accurate predictions of responses. Also, another insightful finding was the reactions of fathers who accidentally discovered the adolescent that ranged from highly rejecting to highly accepting. It seems that an emergent pattern of extreme variability among father's reactions is present across different reports of the disclosure/discovery process.

Taken all together, it seems that adolescents will disclose to those with whom they are most comfortable and whose reaction they can likely predict as being the most accepting. Following this, friends continue to be the most frequent group disclosed to. It is also important to note that reaction to accidental discovery is neutral to high across groups and reflects greater rates of acceptance than the predicted reactions of those to whom adolescents choose specifically not to disclose. Reactions to accidental discovery might be mediated by adolescents being more vigilant and careful to avoid accidental discovery among those from whom they predict the most rejecting reactions. Therefore, those who accidentally discover the adolescents' sexual orientation may not represent people that the adolescent is most worried or concerned about knowing. Future research should more carefully investigate this process and the nuances that may impact if discovery is a positive, negative, or neutral experience. Such research should focus on identifying if discovery happened subsequent to other disclosures or the level of discomfort or concern the adolescent experienced when being discovered. Also, future

research should identify if different methods of discovery are potentially more negative (e.g., confrontation vs. a target of disclosure breaking confidence). This will yield more informative results that may help aid in creating a more accurate and representative model of identity disclosure.

Disclosure versus discovery. In combination with patterns of discovery and reactions, different outcomes related to psychosocial development must also be considered. It was expected that differences in self-esteem would be evident among those who purposefully disclosed versus those who had been accidentally discovered. Contrary to this expectation, no differences were found in outcomes of self-esteem among those who had been accidentally discovered and those who had not. This is consistent with the evidence that accidental discovery often results in neutral or positive outcomes in reaction, and suggests that accidental discovery need not necessarily be construed as a negative event. Also, it should be noted that variability of reactions for purposeful disclosure ranged as widely from highly accepting to highly rejecting as did the responses from those who accidentally discovered, underscoring what has been recognized as the complicated task of selecting an accepting target of disclosure (Zera, 1992). Again, more research is needed to understand more specific differences that still might exist between those who disclose and those who have been discovered that may be different depending on the timing and level of disclosure versus discovery. The initial results of discovery being neutral or positive are hopeful, but further research is needed to see how more specific differences in discovery histories may impact overall identity or subsequent exploration.

Identity Exploration

Participation in intimate interpersonal relationships is one of the primary tasks of adolescent development and helps initiate experiences that will establish future behaviors and involvement in adult romantic relationships (Furman et al., 2002). Coming to understand the influence of age and biological sex as well as outcomes associated with these relational experiences will provide data that will help facilitate a normative understanding of adolescent sexual minority romantic development. It is important to note that despite observing few statistically significant findings, effect sizes for several of the analyses examining romantic and sexual exploration were moderate to large. Interpretation of these results will be based on both statistical significance and the magnitude of effect sizes.

Age differences. The results of the analyses examining differences between middle adolescents and late adolescents in the types of romantic and sexual behaviors and relationships/experiences that they reported was commensurate across groups in all areas related to attraction, dating, affectionate and sexual behaviors/intercourse. The only significant differences identified across groups were in relation to opposite-sex group dating and saying "I love you." Both groups showed similar rates of responding for same-sex partners in these areas; however, in both instances late adolescents were more likely to engage in these activities with the opposite-sex than were middle adolescents. In order to understand these differences it may be necessary to identify possible ambiguity in how the question was presented. In both instances participants were asked simply the rate of engagement in group dating and saying "I love you"; however, it was not specified if these behaviors were romantically motivated. Therefore, participants were left to

interpret what this meant to them personally and it is possible that many reported engaging in these behaviors outside of a romantic context. In light of this consideration, there may be a significant difference between middle and late adolescents in these areas because late adolescents have had longer to develop a wider and more diverse peer group that may include a higher proportion of opposite-sex friends with whom they are engaging in these behaviors in a nonromantic way. Also, it is possible that these results may be due to Type I error given the number of analyses conducted. Therefore, the results reported may have been found to be significant when there was no true difference. Future research with a larger sample would help determine the validity of these findings.

Biological sex differences. The results of the analyses for differences between males and females in the types of romantic and sexual behaviors and relationships/experiences that they reported was commensurate across groups in the areas related to group dating, going steady, affectionate behaviors, petting, and romantic behaviors. Unlike age, differences were observed in behaviors that are more romantically and sexually exclusive. A significant relationship was found between biological sex and having an opposite-sex crush with females being more likely to have opposite-sex crushes. This is consistent with previously reported results of this study and past research that identifies females as being more nonexclusive in attractions (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000). Other significant differences were identified, with males being more likely to engage in same-sex dating and sexual intercourse than females. Again, it has been documented that desire appears to be sufficient motivation for males' engagement in same-sex behaviors compared to females that may account for this observed difference (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Finally, females in this group engaged in opposite-

sex sexual intercourse at a significantly higher rate than males. This finding may possibly complicate the previous explanation; however, other important sample characteristics must be taken into account in the discussion of these outcomes. A much higher proportion of females identified as straight and bisexual compared to males who primarily identified using the gay/lesbian traditional label. This uneven distribution across these groups is a limitation that may skew the behaviors and attractions reported. However, despite this limitation a greater range of attraction and behavior for same- and opposite-sex partners was reported throughout the female sample suggesting the possible efficacy of conceptualizing female sexual development as more nonexclusive than males. Future research utilizing a larger and more equally distributed sample could provide greater clarity regarding these reported differences.

Overall, it appears that few significant differences exist for age or biological sex in regards to these behaviors and attractions. Nonetheless, the differences that do exist suggest that development may open up greater possibilities for a range of experience in older adolescents with opposite-sex partners. As well, biological sex differences exist, in which females' nonexclusive attractions may translate into a greater fluidness in experiences across same- and opposite-sex partners. In consideration of the moderate to large effect sizes demonstrated specifically among biological sex and behaviors, future research with a larger sample size will likely find important differences between these groups.

Relationship styles and psychosocial outcomes. Differences were observed between relationship styles (i.e., same-sex romantic relationships, same-sex passionate friendships, same-sex exclusively sexual relationships, heterosexual relationships, or no

participation in relationships) on relationship competence outcomes. The primary areas demonstrating significant differences were in regards to relational-esteem (positive evaluation of ability to intimately relate to another) and relational depression (depression about status of one's intimate relationships). Relational-esteem was significantly higher for those participating in same-sex romantic relationships and heterosexual dating compared to those who did not participate in relationships. These differences are understandable as those engaging in dating relationships will have more practice and greater opportunity to relate to another person, thus making their relational-esteem higher than adolescents who never have this opportunity. This provides additional evidence that youth learn important skills by engaging in dating and romantic relationships regardless if they are with the same- or opposite-sex (Diamond, 2003). Relational depression was also significantly lower for those in same-sex romantic relationships and same-sex intimate friendships compared to higher rates for those who did not participate in relationships. Both these relationships provide emotional intimacy and social support that are important aspects in relationship satisfaction not enjoyed by those who are withdrawn from relationships.

Although nonsignificant, large effect sizes were observed for pairwise comparisons between all relationship styles (same-sex romantic relationships, same-sex exclusively sexual relationships, passionate friendships, and heterosexual dating) and those who did not participate in relationships. General trends suggested that those who did not participate in relationships had the most negative results across outcomes (e.g. relational esteem, relational depression, self-esteem). Several research studies have documented the negative effects for sexual minorities who become isolated (Alexander,

2002; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Quinn, 2002; Sullivan & Wodarski, 2002); and it appears that isolation from relationship participation adds less positive relational outcomes to this list. Further, although not significantly different, those who participate in same-sex exclusively sexual relationships also show slightly lower outcomes compared to the other three groups. In the opposite direction, those engaging in same-sex romantic relationships and same-sex passionate friendships consistently were reporting the most adaptive scores across outcomes. Although these trends were not significant they are interesting to consider, given the relatively small sample size, moderate to large effect sizes, and exploratory nature of this study. Trends suggest that relationships that provide potential for emotional intimacy (e.g., same-sex romantic relationships, same-sex intimate friendships) may be more beneficial than relationships that provide only sexual intimacy (same-sex exclusively sexual). Future research with a larger number of participants in each relationship style could give better insight into the possibility of these trends moving towards statistical significance.

Overall, it is apparent that engaging in some type of relationship results in better outcomes than withdrawal from relationships. Of course, as noted in the methods section it is important to recognize that those not participating in relationships likely represent a heterogeneous group of adolescents who are purposefully abstaining, as well as those who, despite desire, are unable to be in a relationship. Also, the large proportion of adolescent sexual minorities who reported engaging predominantly in same-sex romantic relationships in this study is encouraging; these findings suggest that although alternative relationships may be important avenues for developing the capacity to engage in future intimate relationships, adolescents may have more access to meaningful same-sex

romantic relationships than previously thought. Additionally, better outcomes may also be complemented by alternative relationships that provide emotional support and intimacy. Thus, adolescent sexual minorities should be supported in seeking both romantic relationships and alternative emotionally supportive relationships to enhance positive relational outcomes.

Summary and Limitations

Overall, the results of this study support the basic tenets of social constructionist theory and multidimensional models of identity development. It is apparent that desire, behavior, and sexual orientation are not reflective factors combining to make a unitary construct. On the contrary, it seems that there is much fluidness in attractions, behaviors, and self-identification. Further, disclosure of sexual orientation seems as complicated as the formation of identity. The results of this study support past research indicating that predicted reaction is the main motivation in disclosure and groups most likely of acceptance will continue to be the principal targets of disclosure. Patterns of discovery are also complicated but results suggest that ramifications of discovery are not significantly different than purposeful disclosure. Finally, as identity is formed and disclosed, exploration of these processes through relationships seems to be more straightforward. It seems important to note that some benefits may be apparent in relationship styles that promote emotional intimacy, however, overall engagement in any interpersonal relationship style shows positive benefits compared to those who do not participate. Taken together, adolescent sexual minority development is a complex process that cannot be understood through a generalized narrow model, but must rather

acknowledge meaningful differences among groups and individuals (e.g., biological sex) in order to fully capture these youths' experiences.

The primary limitation of the current study is the use of a convenience sample in recruiting participants. The initial target population was local sexual minority adolescents; however, due to recruitment difficulties the sample drawn from was targeted toward adolescent sexual minorities who were actively engaged with community supports. Many difficulties exist in trying to identify and contact sexual minorities who would be interested in participating, therefore, the main recruitment strategy involved contacting local sexual minority community centers and web-based groups from electronic lists provided by these centers. Also, participants were recruited through referrals of those who had already participated and project staff.

The largest proportion of the sample was recruited from a sexual minority community center "queer prom" activity. Although this activity was open to the community, it is likely that those attending may have been more likely to be in a romantic relationship with the same-sex versus the general population of sexual minority adolescents. Also, the individuals at these activities identifying as straight likely do not represent the general population of those identifying as straight. Because the participants in this study represent a unique composition of individuals, generalizing results to other populations must be done with great caution.

Creating a new measure was necessary to answer the research questions for this project. Because of the diversity of research questions, no preexisting measure would yield adequate information. A strength of the current measure was the addition of continuous measures and open-ended items that represented a multidimensional model

approach, missing in existing measures. Limitations of the measure included a lack of questions eliciting specific details regarding motivation, intent, and purpose of different behaviors and experiences. While general trends and patterns can be extrapolated, interpretations of these patterns must be done with caution and more specific information regarding motives in these areas will help provide more accurate explanations.

In regards to these limitations, several recommendations have been made throughout the discussion of this project. In summary, the greatest contribution of future research in this area would be to further explore trends and significant findings of this study with larger, more representative samples. Also, providing more in-depth questions including qualitative questions that assess personal meaning of developmental events and the motivation and intent behind them will provide a rich source of data that will supplement the current knowledge base. Such data will likely lead to a better ability to understand and interpret results. Finally, it is necessary to revisit the importance of influential variables such as age and, especially, gender in regard to sexual development. Despite the importance of these factors, the current study was only able to assess the impact of these variables in a preliminary manner. Sample size limitations precluded the inclusion of gender and age as factors in many analyses; however, additional research following these lines of inquiry could lead to insightful understandings of the impact of these important contextual factors in sexual identity development. As future research continues, there will likely be more utility in disbanding heterosexual and homosexual research camps and looking at holistic sexual development. Such an approach will provide a potential twofold benefit. First, it is likely that important gender differences will continue to be identified and give greater understanding of the adolescent sexual

developmental process that is likely unique for males and females. Secondly, it will help move away from the stigmatization and exclusiveness of conceptualizing sexual minority youth as different from heterosexual peers and provide a normalized picture of development appropriate for this population.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT
Adolescent Sexual Minorities Identity Development

Introduction/Purpose: Professor Renee Galliher in the Department of Psychology at Utah State University is in charge of this research study. We are asking parental permission for your teenager to participate in this research because we want to learn about teenager's romantic and sexual experiences. Specifically, we are interested in understanding teenagers' romantic attractions, sexual behaviors, and relationship experiences so that we can help teens who are struggling in their relationships.

Procedures: Participation in this study will take approximately thirty minutes. Your teenager will be asked to fill out some forms that will ask questions about his/her sexual identity, sexual attractions and behaviors, and romantic experiences.

Risks: There is some risk of feeling uncomfortable in this study. Some teenagers may not want to be share personal information with the researchers. We will do everything we can to make your adolescent feel more comfortable. Remember that we keep the information about your child private and will not disclose answers to anyone outside of our research team. Also, he/she can choose not to answer sensitive questions on the forms, although it will help us the most if he/she answers all the questions honestly.

Benefits: We hope that your teenager will find this study to be interesting and fun. Your teenager's information will help us learn more about adolescent sexuality and romantic relationships. It will also help teachers, parents, counselors, and policy makers in their work with teenagers.

Explanation and Offer to Answer Questions: Jenna Glover or Renee Galliher has explained this study to you. If you have more questions, you can ask the Primary Investigator, Professor Renee Galliher, at (435) 797-3391.

Payment: When your teenager finishes participating in this research, he/she will receive ten dollars.

Voluntary Nature of Participation and Right to Withdraw without Consequences: Allowing your teenager to be in this research study is entirely your and his/her choice. You can refuse to have your teenager be involved and he/she can stop at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality: Consistent with federal and state rules, your teenager's responses will be kept private. Only Professor Galliher and Jenna Glover, the student investigator, will be able to see the data. All information will be kept in locked filing cabinets in a locked room. Your teenager's answers will only have an ID number and not his/her name. Your teenager's name will **not** be used in any report about this research and his/her specific answers will not be shared with anyone else. Data from this study may be used for three years by our research team before it is destroyed. When the research has been completed, a newsletter with the general results will be sent to your adolescent.

INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT FORM
Adolescent Sexual Minorities Identity Development

IRB Approval Statement: The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects at Utah State University has approved this research project. If you have any questions regarding IRB approval of this study or your rights, you may contact the IRB administrator at (435)797-1821.

Copy of Consent: You have been given two copies of the informed consent. Please sign both copies and keep one for your files.

Investigator Statement: I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual by me or my research assistant. The individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with participation in the study. Any questions have been answered.

Signature of PI and Student Researcher:

Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Department of Psychology
Utah State University
(435) 797-3391

Date

Jenna Glover
Student Researcher

Date

Parent Consent:

I have read the above description of the study and I consent for my teenager to participate.

Parent's Signature _____ Date: _____

Print name _____

Youth Assent:

I understand that my parent(s)/guardian is/are aware of this research and have given permission for me to participate. I understand that it is up to me to participate even if my parents say yes. If I do not want to be in this study, I don't have to. No one will be upset if I don't want to participate or if I change my mind later and want to stop. I can ask questions that I have about this study now or later. By signing below, I agree to participate.

Signature of Participant

Date

Print Name

Appendix B: Measures

Background Information

1. *Biological Sex:* ____ Male ____ Female

Gender: ____ Male ____ Female
 ____ Other (specify)

2. *Age:* ____

3. *Which category or categories best describe your racial background? (check all that apply)*

- ____ White
 ____ Hispanic/Latino
 ____ African American
 ____ Native American
 ____ Asian
 ____ Other (please describe)

*if you selected more than one race, with which one do you most identify?

4. *Religious Affiliation:*

- ____ LDS
 ____ Catholic
 ____ Protestant
 ____ Jewish
 ____ Baptist
 ____ Other

(please specify _____)

____ None

5. *How important is religion to you?*

- ____ Very important
 ____ Fairly important
 ____ Fairly unimportant
 ____ not important at all
 ____ Don't know
 ____ Not applicable

6. *What grade are you currently in?*

- ____ Not yet in high school
 ____ 9th ____ 10th ____ 11th ____ 12th
 ____ Dropped out of high school
 ____ Graduated high school

7. *What is your parents' marital status?*

- ____ Married to each other
 ____ Divorced or separated from each other*
 ____ Never married to each other
 ____ Widowed
 ____ Other

*If divorced or separated, how long have they been divorced? _____ yrs.

8. *How far in school did your father go?*

- ____ Some High School
 ____ High School Graduate
 ____ Technical School
 ____ Some College
 ____ College Graduate
 ____ Graduate School

9. *How far in school did your mother go?*

- ____ Some High School
 ____ High School Graduate
 ____ Technical School
 ____ Some College
 ____ College Graduate
 ____ Graduate School

Below is a list of dating and sexual behaviors that people might engage in with males or females. For each question, please place a check next to the statement that best describes your experience.

- | | Male | Female |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. <i>Have you had a crush on</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently |

- | | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| 2. <i>Went out on a date with a group of friends with a</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently |

- | | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| 3. <i>Went out on a date alone with a</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently |

- | | Male | Female |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| 4. <i>Gone Steady with a</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently |

- | | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| 5. <i>Affectionate behaviors (hugging, hand holding, kissing)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in my lifetime |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least once in the past year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently |

6. *Petting*
(*clothes on or off*)

Male

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

Female

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

7. *Sexual Intercourse*

Male

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

Female

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

8. *Saying "I love you"*

Male

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

Female

____ Never
____ At least once in my lifetime
____ At least once in the past year
____ Currently

9. *Using both rating scales below circle the numbers that best describe your sexual attraction*

Not at all
Homosexual

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Highly
Homosexual

Not at all
Heterosexual

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Highly
Heterosexual

10. *What kind of relationship style best describes your relationship experiences*

- ____ I usually have extremely close same-sex friendships, but they are not sexual
____ I usually have same-sex sexual relationships, but there is not much emotional involvement
____ I usually have same-sex romantic relationships that are both emotional and sexual
____ I usually date heterosexually
____ I rarely or never participate in romantic relationships or dating

11. *Have you ever been attracted to someone of the same-sex?*

- ____ Yes. If yes, how old were you the first time _____
____ No

17. What is your most important reason for **not** disclosing to the person that you listed first in question 16?

18. Has your sexual preference ever been accidentally or unwillingly discovered by someone you did not want to know?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (If no, please skip to question 21)

19. If yes, how was it discovered? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Someone I disclosed to told another person.
☐ I was discovered engaging in romantic or sexual behaviors with someone of the same-sex
☐ I was confronted
☐ Other (please describe) _____

20. Please list the five most important people that have accidentally or inadvertently discovered your sexual orientation (if less than five, leave lines blank). Write the person's relationship to you on the line (e.g., mother, sister, friend) and circle the number that best describes the person's reaction.

Relationship to you	Totally Rejecting									Totally Accepting	
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

21. What word(s) would best describe the way you see your sexual orientation?

22. What word(s) do you use to describe your sexual orientation to others?

23. Which of the following mainstream labels best describes the way you see your sexual orientation?

_____ Straight

_____ Gay/Lesbian

_____ Bisexual

_____ I don't know

_____ Other; please specify _____

24. Which of the following best describes what you tell most others about your sexual orientation?

_____ Straight

_____ Gay/Lesbian

_____ Bisexual

_____ I don't know

_____ Other; please specify _____

25. How old were you when you first thought that you were gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

_____ Age

_____ Never Experienced

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Please use the scale below to respond to the following statements.

	1	2	3	4
	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	1	2	3	4
2. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4
4. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	1	2	3	4
5. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1	2	3	4
6. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1	2	3	4
7. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	1	2	3	4
8. I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4
9. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1	2	3	4
10. At times I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4

RAQ

RELATIONSHIP SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS: The items listed below refer to people in a close relationship--i.e., a relationship between two partners in an intimate relationship. Please read each item carefully and decide to what extent it is characteristics of your feelings and behaviors. Give each item a rating of how much it applies to you by using the following scale:

- 1 = Not at all characteristic of me.
- 2 = Slightly characteristic of me.
- 3 = Somewhat characteristic of me.
- 4 = Moderately characteristic of me.
- 5 = Very characteristic of me.

NOTE:

Remember to respond to all items, even if you are not completely sure.
Also, please be honest in responding to these items.

1. I am a good partner for an intimate relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am depressed about the relationship aspects of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think about intimate relationships all the time.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am better at intimate relationships than most other people.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel good about myself as an intimate partner.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I think about close relationships more than anything else.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I sometimes have doubts about my relationship competence.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am disappointed about the quality of my close relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I don't daydream very much about intimate relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am not very sure of myself in close relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I cannot seem to be happy in intimate relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I tend to be preoccupied with close relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I think of myself as an excellent intimate partner.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am less than happy with my ability to sustain an intimate relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I'm constantly thinking about being in an intimate relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I would rate myself as a "poor" partner for a close relationship.	1	2	3	4	5

17. I feel down about myself as an intimate partner.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I think about intimate relationships a great deal of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am confident about myself as a relationship partner.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I feel unhappy about my interpersonal relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I seldom think about being involved in a close relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I am not very confident about my potential as an intimate partner.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I feel pleased with my love relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I hardly ever fantasize about highly intimate relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I sometimes doubt my ability to maintain a close relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I feel sad when I think about my intimate experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I probably think about love relationships less often than most people.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I have few doubts about my capacity to relate to an intimate partner.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I am not discouraged about myself as a loving partner.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I don't think about intimate relationships very often.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I responded to the above based on:					
(A) A current intimate relationship.					
(B) A past intimate relationship.					
(C) An imagined intimate relationship.					

When the study is completed, we would like to send you a newsletter outlining the results. Also, we will be conducting additional research on sexual minorities and may wish to contact you in the future to participate in other studies. If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the study or if you are willing to be contacted for further research, please provide your name, address and phone number below.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of the study.

☐ I would like to be contacted in the future to be asked about participating in other studies

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Appendix C: Tables

Table C.1

Two-Way Contingency Tables Statistical Results for Attractions and Behaviors With Same- and Opposite-Sex Partners for Middle and Late Adolescents

Behaviors	Same-sex				Opposite-sex			
	χ^2	df	p	Cram V	χ^2	df	p	Cram V
Crush	4.08	3	.25	.224	4.97	3	.17	.249
Group date	.97	3	.80	.109	17.80	3	>.01	.473
Individual date	2.13	3	.55	.161	6.67	3	.08	.172
Going steady	1.67	3	.64	.143	1.80	3	.62	.150
Affectionate behaviors	2.06	3	.56	.158	1.30	3	.73	.128
Petting	.03	3	.99	.020	1.09	3	.78	.117
Sexual intercourse	3.36	3	.34	.202	4.41	3	.22	.235
Saying "I love you"	.78	3	.85	.098	8.58	3	.04	.328

Table C.2

Two-Way Contingency Tables Statistical Results for Attractions and Behaviors With Same- and Opposite-Sex Partners for Biological Sex

Behaviors	Same-sex				Opposite-sex			
	χ^2	df	p	Cram V	χ^2	df	p	Cram V
Crush	5.27	3	.15	.255	19.59	3	>.01	.495
Group date	2.20	3	.53	.164	7.52	3	.06	.307
Individual date	9.54	3	.02	.341	2.37	3	.50	.172
Going steady	7.84	3	.05	.309	4.14	3	.25	.227
Affectionate behaviors	2.67	3	.44	.180	3.22	3	.36	.201
Petting	7.85	3	.12	.309	5.76	3	.12	.268
Sexual intercourse	9.80	3	.02	.346	8.09	3	.04	.318
Saying "I love you"	2.16	3	.54	.162	2.73	3	.44	.185